

*Miss
Tiverton
Goes
Out*

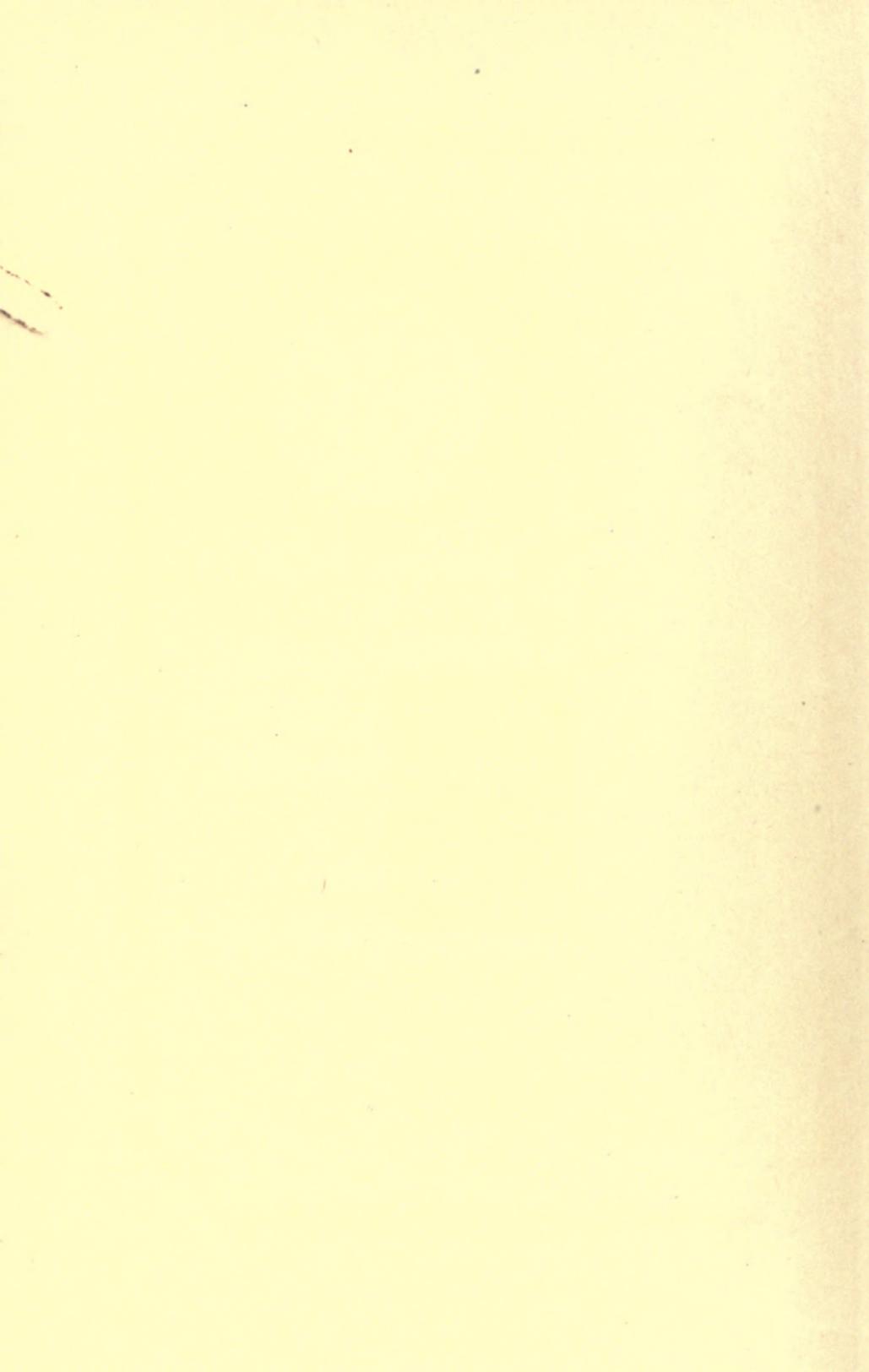




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MRS. VIRGINIA B. SPORER



MISS TIVERTON
GOES OUT



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GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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Printed in the United States of America

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2039156

MISS TIVERTON GOES OUT

PART ONE

WORLD WITHOUT END

CHAPTER I

“SOMETHING must be done about Miss Tiverton’s cat.”

Juliet’s father cast a sort of comprehensive glare around the luncheon table—a glare at once truculent and a little wistful, as though he realized both the futility and the urgency of his remark; as though, resentfully forestalling its bored and indifferent reception by his family, he yet cherished a faint hope that some one might make a helpful rejoinder. So far, though he had launched his appeal in precisely the same terms at least twice a week for two years, it had invariably been met by shrugs, by silence, or by polite commiserations that led nowhere.

Now Olive sniggered, Angela sighed, Leslie mi-aowed half under his breath, and Juliet’s mother said sweetly:

“Yes, dear, something really *must* be done.”

It was a very hot Saturday in late July. Leslie’s holidays had just begun: the annual outing was still a fortnight ahead; and a wasp had settled in the raspberry tart. It may have been this particular combination of circumstances that caused Juliet’s father to bring his fist down on the table with a bang at which Angela elaborately winced.

“I’m not joking,” he thundered. “The nuisance has gone on quite long enough. I get no sleep at night, and

I've a right to sleep. The rest of you may have as little to do as Miss Tiverton herself, but you might have a decent regard for the one member of the family who does work—to keep you all in comfortable idleness."

Olive blinked her eyelids very quickly—a trick with which she often relieved her feelings when laughter would have given offense. Angela sighed more deeply than before, and passed a hand over her brow. Juliet's mother became conversational.

"It's such a funny thing, dear, that *I* hardly ever hear the cat. Now, you'd think I *should* hear it, whenever you do; but really ——"

"It's not a funny thing, and I shouldn't think it," Juliet's father almost shouted. "Like many people who have no particular need to, you sleep so soundly that the trump of doom wouldn't wake you."

"I almost hope it wouldn't," said Juliet's mother. "I should be so dreadfully frightened. But, dearest"—this was added very hurriedly, because a convulsed look had appeared on the face at the other end of the table—"but, dearest, Angela has often assured me that *she* doesn't hear the cat nearly as much as you do, and you know what a very light sleeper dear Angela is."

"I don't know anything of the sort. But Angela's window happens to be on the other side of the house. Anyhow, what does it matter who doesn't hear it if I do? Isn't it enough that *I* can never be sure of a night's rest?"

"Quite enough, dear. More than enough. Very much more than enough."

"Then what d'you propose? I merely want a plain answer to a plain question."

"Perhaps, dear, I might write a little note to Miss Tiverton."

"You've written before, and much good it did us. Can't you go to see her?"

"But she's never called."

"Well, confound it, this isn't a social matter. You've a perfect right to go and make a complaint."

"I have thought of a plan, dear. Let cook speak to Miss Tiverton's housekeeper."

"Why not," said Angela in her mouse-like yet penetrating voice, "ask the police to help us? The police are always so kind."

"The best thing," Olive threw in, "would be for Miss Tiverton to die. She's an awful nuisance all round, with her trees spoiling our garden, and her bonfires, and her gardener's poultry."

"Oh, Olive," came the gentle remonstrance from the bottom of the table, "one should never wish for anybody's death."

"When that melancholy event does happen," said Juliet's father, with sudden cheerfulness, "we shall find ourselves better off in more ways than one."

"You'll buy part of the garden, won't you?" Angela asked him softly. "I should love a rose-garden."

"I don't know about rose-gardens," he answered, with a short laugh; then, relapsing into gloom: "But from all I can hear, the old hag seems to have lived there from time immemorial, and I'm beginning to be afraid she's too old to die."

Juliet meanwhile had said nothing. Habitually, she listened more than she talked. This was partly due to the fact of her being, by four years, the youngest of the family; but also it had something to do with the particular family to which she belonged. It was the kind of family which takes no notice of any unit except when that unit is strongly asserting itself: it was, preeminently, the kind of family in which to be overlooked is not otherwise than a boon. When you are thinking, feeling, doing a little differently from every one else, it is comfortable not to have to account for the differences. Of course, Juliet, at ten years old, couldn't put it to herself even as clearly as that: she only had an extra sense of well-being every time her family took her more than usually for granted. It goes without saying that she was lonely; but the word

had no place in her vocabulary. There were, however, a number of things that she wanted to know, and that she supposed she never would know—because there didn't seem to be any one whose business it was to tell her.

What, for instance, could that possibly mean about Miss Tiverton being too old to die? And what was "time immemorial"? Her family were always using mysterious words about Miss Tiverton: she remembered another—"antediluvian." She had summoned up courage to ask Olive what that meant, and Olive had said: "Before the Flood." "What Flood?" had been her next question (because obviously it couldn't be the Flood in Genesis), but, instead of getting an answer, she had been told to run away and not worry. So at bed-time she had asked the servant who brushed her hair what "antediluvian" *really* meant; and the servant said it wasn't her business to understand Greek and Latin, and Miss Juliet had better ask her father. Possibly she would have done so; but when an opportunity offered she found she had temporarily forgotten the word. It came back to her now: "antediluvian" . . . "time immemorial" . . . "too old to die."

When lunch was over she wandered out by herself into the garden, gravitating by instinct to the little summer-house under Miss Tiverton's gaunt wall. This was not a favorite retreat with her mother and sisters, for it was said to be infested with earwigs; but Juliet liked its quietude and comparative remoteness.

In front of it a narrow and somewhat neglected strip of garden, between the north side of the house and Miss Tiverton's wall, ran down on a gentle slope to the more showy part of the demesne. At the end of the short vista Juliet could see her family, momentarily assembled under the ash tree before they dispersed to their various avocations. Saturday afternoons were regarded as an "occasion" by all except her. If her mother and Angela had nothing special to do, they made something—some-

thing which would cause them to put on their best clothes, order round the car, bemoan their fate in never getting a quiet week-end, and envy her father his liberty to go to sleep. Olive sometimes accompanied them, but more often set out on a private expedition of her own. Leslie always had some engagement with a school friend. But Juliet rather dreaded Saturday afternoons. Apart from her lessons with a daily governess, she had no specific occupation in life. And a holiday when you have nothing whatever to do can scarcely be regarded as an unmixed blessing. Yet she was not in the least conscious of being neglected: the gaze she bent upon her family over there under the ash tree was perfectly benevolent. Demanding nothing from them, she yet regarded them with some degree of proprietary interest, and, in a way, was proud of them.

Her mother, unlike the majority of mothers in the neighborhood, might almost be taken for an actress; and actresses were very wonderful people. Angela, too, was exciting—like something out of a fashion-plate, with her pretty face, and her impossible attitudes (impossible, Juliet meant, for ordinary people), and her enormous long-lashed eyes. Olive might be less fascinating—certainly she was not beautiful, and there were no delicate mysteries about her complexion; but she had such “go,” as Juliet’s governess called it, and used such daring expressions, and won so many tennis tournaments, that she was quite a personage (so Miss Anderson said). Leslie from his own account, which was all that Juliet could go by, had no equals in prowess at his school. And as for her father—well, she had an impression that the great world of “business” couldn’t possibly get on without him; and he was (to quote Miss Anderson again) a “fine figure of a man,” despite the chronic frown on his brow and the heavy droop of his underlip.

What a funny thing that with such a handsome, interesting, and smart family living just over her garden wall Miss Tiverton should never have called. They didn’t

say she was too old to call; only that she was too old to die.

It seemed to Juliet a very long time since she and her family had come to live at Ashtree Towers. She had been only eight years old then, and now she was ten. Already her memories of the earlier life in Ealing were beginning to grow dim.

Ashtree Towers, with all its resplendent newness, its space and comfort, its magic surprises in the way of telephone, electric light, inexhaustible hot water, and a "dinner-lift," had profoundly impressed her; so also had its garden, which sprang into being with such marvelous celerity. Naked and meaningless one day, except for the ash tree, it was transformed on the next (so Juliet seemed to remember) into a replica of one of those gay, neat, shapely gardens you see pictured in nurserymen's catalogues—the beds decorated with symmetrical dabs of color, the waste ground in the middle covered over with smooth turf, the bareness of the wall at the bottom broken by a row of compact little shrubs, the trunk of the lonely ash tree encircled by a green-painted bench, the terrace on to which the drawing-room windows opened adorned with great stone pots full of trailing pink geraniums—all so tidy and bright and new. And nothing in that garden ever seemed to die, or even to fade; for whether it were hyacinths, or tulips, or calceolarias, all would suddenly vanish, and in their place would appear something else, just as tidy and bright and new. Only the ash tree was really permanent. And there was something queer about that ash tree—something obstinate and vaguely hostile. In such a tidy, well-ordered garden, why did it not only seize the opportunity of the first autumn wind to scatter its leaves all over the smooth lawn, but seem to glory in doing so? And why did it toss its arms about in that strange, mocking, excitable way, and fling down its twigs with a snap on to the head of any one who happened to be passing—particularly Angela's? Juliet at times felt a great longing to make

friends with the ash tree; yet even for her it was subtly unapproachable, and never more so than when she sat on the green circular bench.

But the strongest impression made upon her by the migration to Ashtree Towers was not connected with any of these material aspects. It had to do with the transformation of her family—from what to what, Juliet could scarcely define: they had always been more important than any family but the Royal Family; and now, without of course becoming the Royal Family, they seemed somehow a little more important even than it. Perhaps it was because her father owned the land on which they and all their neighbors lived; perhaps the Royal Family didn't own Buckingham Palace and Windsor in quite the same way. However that might be, Juliet couldn't imagine the King being consulted and sought after, as her father was, about all sorts of mysterious things which you would think a private person had nothing to do with—like the site for a new church, and the naming of roads, and whether the main telephone wire might pass over such and such a bit of ground. And all the ladies in their road and the adjoining roads smiled so sweetly when they met her mother and Angela and Olive, and pressed them so warmly to attend tea-parties and bazaars. All but Miss Tiverton, who never, so far as they knew, came out of her house or invited any one into it. Perhaps it would have been different if Juliet's father had owned the land which Miss Tiverton occupied. But he didn't; and the fact that he didn't seemed to worry him a good deal. Juliet couldn't see why he should mind so much; for Miss Tiverton's premises—to judge from the little you could manage to see—had no attractions that would appeal to her family. They were dull and dark, shut in with trees; and the house had a dingy appearance. Still, her father might have liked to make it all tidy and bright and new. But that wouldn't have been nearly so suitable to Miss Tiverton.

Possessed of no facts whatever about Miss Tiverton except that she had lived there from time immemorial and was too old to die, Juliet came unquestioningly to the conclusion that Miss Tiverton's surroundings were just right for Miss Tiverton. Moreover, had Miss Tiverton's premises not been where they were and as they were, Ashtree Towers and all the other houses her father had built would have lacked much of the interest they held for Juliet. There would have been less ground for speculation about the time when they did not exist, and that even more thrilling time when they were coming into existence. As it was, she never tired of trying to imagine how it had all seemed to Miss Tiverton. That was her favorite subject for day-dreams, and it occupied her now as she sat, chin in hands, gazing at the chimney of Miss Tiverton's gardener's cottage, built against their own garden wall. (It was strange to think that the other side of this very wall belonged to Miss Tiverton herself, and that when Miss Tiverton's cat sat and howled upon it in the middle of the night it could only be trespassing with one pair of its legs.)

Time immemorial, whatever it involved besides, must certainly date back to the days before her father built this house and the others down the road. At the very least, it implied a period when Miss Tiverton saw from her windows something that was not houses. What, then, did she see? Only the ash tree? How long did an ash tree take to grow big? Juliet was sure that her father had not planted the ash tree, so Miss Tiverton must have known it longer than they had. Sometimes she fancied that Miss Tiverton was friends with it, and that the ash tree, if it could, would have transferred itself to her side of the wall. And what had Miss Tiverton actually seen when everything began? Her imagination boggled over the things that Miss Tiverton might have seen, from the beginning of time immemorial.

She heard the swish of the motor as it drove round to the front door; and, roused from her reverie, she saw

that the party on the lawn had broken up. Her mother and Angela and Olive were no doubt indoors, getting ready to go out. Her father, not yet having finished his after-lunch cigar, strolled along the beds devoted to roses, examining them with a judicial eye. Leslie, hands in pockets, accompanied him—an unusual proceeding which caught Juliet's attention. After a few minutes they turned into the side path under Miss Tiverton's wall, her father looking critically about him as if he wondered whether this little strip of garden could be in any way improved. And he kept glancing up at the wall: she heard him say something about "planting it out." She sat very still behind the trellis-work, hoping that they would not come as far as the summer-house. They were within easy earshot when they stopped; a gloomy expression—it was almost a scowl—gathered in her father's face as he surveyed that ivy-covered part of the wall against which the cottage was built.

"I detest ivy," he remarked, as much to himself as to Leslie. "Especially old ivy. What's wanted here is a row of quick-growing trees; but that confounded hovel shuts out all the light and air."

Fresh food, this, for meditation. Since the ivy was old, her father could not have planted it. Who *had* planted the ivy?

Her train of thought was interrupted by Leslie's voice.

"I say, father . . ."

"Well?"

"I want to ask you something. (They can't hear over the wall, can they?) If I promised you should never be bothered with Miss Tiverton's cat again, would you promise to buy me a new fishing-rod before we go away?"

"Eh, what?" said their father, though he could scarcely have failed to hear.

Leslie repeated his proposition.

The dignified person addressed showed signs of per-

turbation. He threw away a good deal of cigar, as though absent-mindedly, and passed his hand several times over his mouth and chin.

“I never make bargains, my boy,” he said at last. “It’s a bad principle. Better to settle each claim on its merits, as it arises.”

Then he turned and walked hurriedly away. Leslie, following, indulged himself in a skip.

But Juliet sat on in the summer-house, her mind all a confusion. What was it, exactly, that had passed between her father and Leslie? If Leslie could really make the cat be quiet, he was a more wonderful person than even he himself had ever seemed to suppose; and, no doubt, he ought to do it; and a new fishing-rod would be only fair if he did. But then, why had her father been more perplexed and worried than pleased? And why should that skip of Leslie’s have associated itself with her idea of the devil? And why did this little bit of garden seem haunted? And why did she feel as if it had been wrong to be sitting in the summer-house while they talked? And why didn’t she run after Leslie and ask him to explain all about it? And why should there be growing upon her this awful conviction that Leslie was wicked and her father not quite good?

CHAPTER II

MISS TIVERTON'S demesne formed a rectangle, with three out-sides of which Juliet was familiar. The fourth boundary was at no point accessible: it lay at the bottom of the hill down half of which their own garden ran, and touched the sloping gardens at the back of another row of houses which stood level, across the little valley, with Ashtree Towers. The north, or "front door" side, as Juliet described it, consisted of a long gray wall facing one of the main roads of the district—the old road, she had heard it called. In this wall stood a high narrow door, reached by three stone steps, with a gas-lamp and an old-fashioned iron bell-pull. This, however, was not the actual front door, for you could see that the house stood some distance away from it. Let into the wall a little farther down were two wooden gates, presumably intended for the ingress and egress of carriages; but no one ever saw them opened.

It seemed quite a long walk from the beginning of this wall in the old road to the turning of the very new road in which stood Ashtree Towers and other specimens of her father's workmanship; and even when you had got into Ashtree Avenue the newness was still for some distance overshadowed by Miss Tiverton's premises. Her east wall, with which the right-hand side of Ashtree Avenue began, was to Juliet by far the most exciting of the three she knew. After some twenty yards it became the actual back of Miss Tiverton's house—a bare, forbidding, almost windowless back, but redeemed, for Juliet, by an area. If you looked over, or through, this area railing, you could see in at a window of Miss Tiverton's basement. Juliet never passed along the road without lagging just here, and gazing downward, in case somebody should go in or out, or pass the basement window; and once or twice she had been lucky enough to see the door

opened by a stubby elderly woman wearing a black silk apron. This person looked as forbidding as the house; and on such occasions Juliet's sense of discretion forbade her peering down into the basement window, to find out what Miss Tiverton's servants were going to have for dinner or tea.

Beyond the house the bleak east wall became a mere wall again; and over the top of it, in early summer, tumbled clusters of wistaria—the only really cheerful thing, except the basement meals, that you ever saw in connection with Miss Tiverton's. Here it was worth pausing, and turning your head to look up, for you could get a sight of two pairs of severe windows—those from which Miss Tiverton must have watched the building of Ashtree Towers. Although on the left-hand side of Ashtree Avenue there were new houses from the outset, it always seemed to Juliet as if the avenue didn't really begin until you had quite passed Miss Tiverton's and come to the painted iron railing which belonged to Ashtree Towers.

The third side of the rectangle, the south side, was of course, the boundary between her father's property and Miss Tiverton's—that old ivy-covered wall which her father resented, which the cat sat upon, which backed Miss Tiverton's gardener's cottage, and hemmed in on one side the narrow strip of their own garden where the summer-house was. This wall seemed to Juliet particularly high and unfriendly: there was no means of climbing up to see over it; and you couldn't cheat its grim impenetrability even by getting above it, by looking from the high north windows of Ashtree Towers, for these showed no more of Miss Tiverton's habitation than you could see from the avenue: the cottage, and some tall trees in front of it, blocked out any view even of her garden. As to the west front of her house, you could nowhere get even a glimpse of it: the only people who could compass that were the inhabitants of the far-off road whose gardens sloped down to meet hers; and they might not be able to see

very much, for there was a kind of jungle at the bottom of Miss Tiverton's garden.

Once, indeed, Juliet had thought there was some hope of seeing—when the gardener had been doing something to their own bottom wall. He left his ladder against it, and Juliet, after climbing up, had examined with awe a bit of waste ground on the other side of the wall, never yet seen at close quarters; then turned herself on the ladder, breathlessly expecting a sight of Miss Tiverton's west front. But the trees were obdurate, and all she got (yet a very big "all") was a top-story window in the gardener's cottage. Dusk had fallen; and behind the latticed panes there passed a bent figure, with wispy hair and a nut-cracker face, carrying a candle in its lean hand. It drew red curtains across the window, and the candle, shining through them, made the red, for a moment, luminous. . . . Juliet gazed and gazed, till the ladder began to wobble from the trembling of her excited person. It had now become clear that Miss Tiverton kept a witch in her retinue—and an ogre, too; for the witch, she knew from hearsay, was one of a "married couple"—and whom could a witch marry but an ogre?

Therefore the cat, when it appeared in all its dark glossy magnificence above the ivy on the lower part of the wall (it had given up its descents to the garden since Juliet's family took to throwing things at it), and stared down with its supercilious, amber-colored eyes, seemed to Juliet a visitant from another world. When the cat was there, she would sit very quietly in her little summer-house, not to disturb it, and would never tire of speculating about the things which it knew and she didn't. There was in her mind a strong though undefined association between the cat and the ash tree. She felt that she could never hope to make friends with the one till she had ingratiated herself with the other; and she had no idea how to set about either task. She would naturally have begun on the cat, but dared not offer it any milk in case her family should find out. All she could do was to gaze at it respect-

fully, and murmur civilities below her breath. It made her sad when the others, espying its majestic vigil, dislodged it with stones and clods of earth. True, their missiles seldom got anywhere near the cat, who merely slithered down with a contemptuous flick of its tail into its own undisputed domain; but they must have hurt its feelings. The comfort was that, in spite of these insults, it never permanently abandoned its claim to the wall-top; and it certainly had opportunities of revenge—in the night, assisted by its many friends. Juliet's little attic bedroom was immediately above her parents'; and the noise the cat made had often (before she got used to it) caused her to shudder in bed and bury her ears under the clothes, recalling the circumstantial accounts of Hell with which her nurse had been used to regale her. But those experiences had never bred in her any animosity toward the cat: they had merely increased her awe of it, and her fervent desire to propitiate it. Knowing that it had all that bottled up inside it while it sat so proud and unruffled on the wall made the cat seem extraordinarily worth cultivating and winning over for her friend. Moreover, it enhanced the glamour which was inseparable from the premises and unknown person of Miss Tiverton. The cat's, after all, was the only voice (except, very occasionally, the housekeeper's at the basement door) which ever reached the outer world from that gloomy, inviolable retreat. Perhaps the cat, too, was unimaginably old, and its weird and ghastly howling an echo from time immemorial.

Great was her surprise when, toward tea-time on this hot Saturday afternoon (the cat having appeared, looked round defiantly and settled itself for a doze, while she watched it in an absorption that precluded any count of time), Leslie approached, surveyed the slumbering animal on its ivied height, and did nothing whatever to disturb it. He stood and gazed upon it thoughtfully; then discovered Juliet.

“Hallo, Owl-eyes!” He paused. It seemed to Juliet that he had something more on the tip of his tongue, but hesitated to say it. Obedient to the instinct of passivity which ruled all her dealings with her family, she merely waited. Leslie shifted his weight from one leg to the other, still casting up keen though furtive glances at the cat—who, waking, returned them with glassy contempt.

“Not a bad-looking animal, is it?” he said at last.

“It’s got a lovely coat,” Juliet answered, feeling a curious shyness about discussing the cat, in its presence, with Leslie.

“You rather like it, don’t you?” he went on.

“I ’spect I should if I knew it better. But of course it doesn’t like us.”

“Oh, you mean because the girls and father are always throwing things at it—silly asses,” said Leslie, as if he had never shared in this pastime. “Well, I think that’s a shame, myself. Suppose you and me make friends with it, Juliet?”

Juliet looked at him gravely. She lived a very isolated life: the comfortable, happy “you and me” of brother and sister had never yet had any place in her intercourse with Leslie. And now that he so impulsively, so unexpectedly, held out the hand of comradeship, she was not sure that she wanted, or knew how, to accept it. Embarrassed by her doubts, she forgot to answer.

“Shan’t we?” said Leslie impatiently.

But her thoughts were busy; and still, for a moment, she made no reply. Besides the astonishing fact of Leslie’s wanting to join her in anything, there was the question of why he suddenly wanted to be friends with the cat. It must have something to do with his plan for getting a new fishing-rod: she could only suppose that he thought himself capable, given opportunity, of exercising some moral influence on the cat. But she did not ask him, because a certain habit of secretiveness on her own part, and the remembered atmosphere of mystery in that talk

she had overheard, made her unwilling to admit even partial knowledge of his affairs.

“Have you lost your tongue?” cried Leslie, stamping. She pulled herself together.

“I’d love to do it,” she said. “But I don’t see how we *could*.”

“Why, it’s easy enough. Just talk kindly to it whenever we see it, and put saucers of milk down here in the summer-house every day, or a bit of fish.”

“Angela or Olive or father might see.”

“They hardly ever come round into this poky little corner. Besides, it’s quite possible,” Leslie added, with a hint of mysterious importance, “that if *I* said a word to them they wouldn’t object. Let’s begin right away.”

He produced from his pocket a haddock’s tail.

“Puss! Puss! Come here.”

For all answer, the cat rose haughtily, stretched itself, yawned, and, with a glance of infinite disdain at Leslie’s offering, withdrew itself down the far side of the wall.

“It’ll want a little time,” Leslie remarked philosophically. “I’m off now. Here, take this, and do your best whenever you get a chance. You might try it with some milk.”

Juliet meekly received the haddock’s tail, and laid it on the bench beside her. There could be no real question of refusing to ally herself with Leslie. From infancy she had always done what she was told. But, then, she had been told to do so very few things, and those almost invariably the kind of things she would have done as a matter of course. No command had ever been given her which could in any way encroach upon that private realm of existence where she thought and acted without reference to her family. This one of Leslie’s did. Her present relations with the cat were unsubstantial enough; but she felt that the soul would slip out of them if they should be consolidated with Leslie’s assistance. However,

she must obviously do what he said—and, after all, it was a good thing that the cat wouldn't be bullied any more.

By and by a gong sounded, and another burden descended on her spirits as she realized that she was "in for" a *tête-à-tête* tea with her father. This not infrequently happened on Saturday afternoons, when, as also on Sundays, the meal was laid in the dining-room. The dining-room being less sacred than the drawing-room to grown-up dignity, and the bread and butter on these occasions being cut thicker than on ordinary days, it was considered unnecessary to provide a separate tea for Juliet in the schoolroom.

She went reluctantly indoors, and having seated herself at the end of the table, behind the teapot, waited patiently till her father should appear. He came at last, looking very sleepy and puffy, and let himself down heavily into a chair; but he did not speak to her until two cups of tea (swallowed hastily and noisily) had put him into a fairly sociable mood.

"What have *you* been doing with yourself?" he then demanded, spreading marmalade on bread and butter.

"Nothing, father, I don't think."

He surveyed her judicially.

"I suppose you mean you've been to sleep. At your age!"

"I don't think I went to sleep," said Juliet.

"What you want," observed her father, cutting the bread and marmalade rather viciously into slices, "is to go to a good school and get woke up."

"I should like to know more," she answered.

"You would, would you? What kind of things d'you want to know?"

"What some words mean. Like—like 'time immemorial.'"

He looked as if he thought that wasn't worth answering, and cut himself some cake.

“Do *you* know, father?”

“Well, I should hope so.”

“Then what does it mean?”

“Depends how you use it,” he said irritably.

“Well, then, if you say a person lived anywhere from time immemorial?”

“Pretty obvious, isn’t it? It means longer back than your memory goes.”

“Would it mean,” Juliet persisted in tones of awe, “a time *nobody* could remember?”

“Well, it might—naturally.”

Juliet couldn’t see why it was natural; but she was anxious not to go off on side-issues. “If your great-great-grandfather could have remembered it if he’d been alive, would it still be time immemorial?”

He had the air of being about to say something very snappy indeed; but he controlled himself.

“It’s what you say about times that have been lost count of. Mammoths, and all that.” And, reaching out to a side-table, he took up a newspaper, behind which he continued his meal.

“There’s no Mammoths in the Bible,” Juliet remarked. “Only that great Leviathan in the Psalms. So would it have to be farther back than Genesis—farther back than the beginning of the world?”

A furious glance shot across to her over the top of the newspaper.

“For pity’s sake, stop pestering. What does it matter to you, anyway?”

Juliet relapsed into silence: after all, she had got as much as she could, for the moment, digest. Her father ate and drank: Juliet, in the intervals between filling his cup, merely gazed at her bread and butter. After a while, forgetting his injunction, she broke out again:

“How old was Methuselah, father?”

He flung down his paper.

“Look here! I pay Miss Anderson to teach you things, and damn me if I’ll submit to this persecution!”

Juliet was neither shocked nor hurt. Her father, of course, was using men's words, which Miss Anderson disapproved of, except in Olive, who was a "character": also, her father was cross; but what did that matter, beyond making it more difficult to get information?

"I don't think," she said peaceably, "Miss Anderson would know."

"Stuff and nonsense! Of course she knows. Why shouldn't she?"

A question outside Juliet's capacity to answer. Perhaps, too, it might prove that Miss Anderson did know, if you really tackled her; but she was very unapproachable, somehow. When once she had set you to learn by heart a page of history or geography, she was sure to go off and look at Angela's new hats, or play an accompaniment for Olive. And in the afternoon walks, which so evidently bored her, she never cared to talk about anything but clothes and theaters and her own and Angela's "young men."

"If you've finished you can go."

Juliet received the permission gratefully, and, mindful of her brother's behest, went to beg a saucer of milk from the cook. Carefully, and trembling with inward excitement, she carried it to the summer-house. The cat was nowhere to be seen. Juliet stood looking wistfully at the wall.

"Cat!" she called softly, "cat!" (She would not have dared to say "Puss.")

She waited till dusk was drawing on. Then she placed the saucer under the bench, with the haddock's tail beside it.

Leslie, at their schoolroom supper, asked her what steps she had taken.

"I expect it'll be all gone in the morning," he commented with satisfaction.

Well, it would be wonderful to feel that the cat really had descended to their summer-house and accepted their offerings.

In the morning nothing remained of the milk, and very little of the haddock's tail. But, as Leslie said, there were other cats about: you couldn't be sure which one had been fed. Fresh provender was put down, and Juliet was bidden to watch—preferably from her own attic window, which commanded the necessary view, so that her presence in the summer-house might not discourage the cat. As she had nothing whatever to do (Miss Anderson having "broken up" for the holidays), there was no particular hardship in spending her time thus, though she would have enjoyed being out-of-doors in the fine summer weather. But toward dusk the vigil became fascinating; for with the setting of the sun and the rising of the evening star she would fall (up there, all alone) into wonderful day-dreams, about Miss Tiverton and the cat.

Early on the fourth day her patience was rewarded. The cat came on to the wall-top, peered into the summer-house, and, after a prolonged toilet, let itself down by the ivy, swaggered along the path, walked loftily through the opening, lapped the milk, demolished a sardine, walked out again, scaled the wall just beyond the cottage and stretched at full length in the sun. Suddenly there was a little tinkling cry from Angela on the lawn.

"That dreadful animal! Throw a stone, Leslie, please!"

"Silly!" Leslie retorted excitedly. "You mustn't throw stones at a black cat. It's most frightfully unlucky."

"Well, but you often do it."

"Never, since I read that."

"Where did you read it?"

"In *Old Moore's Natural History*," said Leslie desperately.

"Oh, dear," wailed Angela. "Perhaps, then, that's why I spilled coffee on my new dance frock."

"Certain to have been. You let black cats alone, and tell Olive, too."

On the morrow a tortoise-shell cat was seen to demolish the rations; but by the day after it was proved that as a rule they fell to the share of Miss Tiverton's cat; and, furthermore, that its feeding-time was about half past nine in the morning. Juliet was told that she might now take up her station in the summer-house, and that if possible she must get on to stroking terms with the cat. Leslie seemed in a fever of impatience.

"We go away in a week," he said. "And if you haven't tamed it by then we shall have to start all over again when we come back."

He said nothing about the fishing-rod, but it was always in Juliet's mind. She could not see that making the cat tame would necessarily stop its howling at night (it had been rather bad about that lately), and so earn Leslie his fishing-rod; but still she refrained from alluding to that overheard conversation.

Leslie had no doubt shown wisdom in deputing to her the task of taming the cat: she was better fitted for it than he, in virtue of instinct and of the great veneration in which she held the object of her endeavor. Five days before the family departure she laid her hand for the first time on its glossy black back: it sidled up to her legs, rubbed against them, and mi-aowed. No experience that later life might bring to her could hold the ineffable thrill of this moment. Miss Tiverton's cat, which had lived with Miss Tiverton from time immemorial, and howled at night since the days before the Flood; Miss Tiverton's cat, which knew all about Miss Tiverton; which was frequently touched by Miss Tiverton; which probably rubbed against Miss Tiverton's silken petticoats as it was now rubbing against her own stocking; Miss Tiverton's cat, which had emerged from and would return to that domain of mystery; which would be lying, perhaps, in a few minutes before the west front of Miss Tiverton's house, that Juliet could never see. . . . Her hand trembled as she stroked its fur.

It seemed too intimate, too wonderful an experience to

report to Leslie. But she did report it, as in duty bound; and he grinned from ear to ear.

"Tell you what," he said, "to-night you put the milk into the tool-shed and leave the door open. Don't go out yourself after breakfast: I want to see if *I* can make some way with the animal, and it might be frightened if there were two of us."

"Why in the tool-shed?" asked Juliet.

"Mother saw you stroking it in the summer-house to-day, and threatened to tell father," replied Leslie glibly. "In the tool-shed no one can see."

So Juliet took the saucer of milk to the tool-shed, which was built into the house wall at right angles to the summer-house. This evening Leslie gave her no sardines or had-docks' tails: there was just the milk.

At eight o'clock next morning, as she finished dressing, she heard steps in the narrow garden below her window. Leslie was walking toward the tool-shed. In his hand he carried, very gingerly, a small white package. He kept looking round him and behind him, stealthily, as though he were afraid of being seen. He vanished, presumably into the tool-shed. A moment later he reappeared, looking up anxiously at the wall.

During breakfast, which was at nine, he seemed nervous; and long before any one else had finished he jumped up, excusing himself on the ground of wanting to remark the tennis-court for a set with Olive. Olive told him she wouldn't be ready to play for a long while yet; but Leslie departed nevertheless. At a quarter to ten he came indoors again, and said that after all the marking was quite good: wouldn't Olive come out and have a game before it grew too hot? She good-naturedly consented. And as there could now be no question of spoiling Leslie's interview with the cat, Juliet repaired to her usual haunt.

Passing the tool-shed, she noticed that Leslie had shut its door. So the cat had had the milk, and gone. But

what was that scratching on the inside of the door? She lifted the latch, and the cat pushed out, looking angry. It had not drunk the milk: it evidently disliked being shut up in a strange place in the dark; and it was never, of course, really hungry. It recognized Juliet, and seemed pleased with her for releasing it. Once more it sidled up to her legs.

She stood still in perplexity. What had Leslie been about? She remembered the white packet, and his furtive actions. She bent and stroked the cat, thinking . . . thinking . . . She had heard of poison being given to animals: once her father had said that that ought to be done to Miss Tiverton's cat; but although his face looked ugly as he said it, she had persuaded herself that he could only have made such a terrible suggestion in fun. Leslie *couldn't*—oh, surely he couldn't! And yet, if any one could, Leslie could. Impossible to say how or why that conclusion flashed upon her; but even her mental image of Leslie at this moment was soaked in the creepy horrifying atmosphere which had characterized his talk with their father. Impulsively, sublimely regardless of consequences, while with one caressing hand she held the cat close to her, she dipped the fingers of the other into the milk, and tasted it. Queer—not quite like milk: she tasted again.

“Deuce!” shouted Leslie from the tennis-court.

She must keep the cat with her: whatever happened, in this chaos of a world beginning to tumble about her ears, she and the cat were in it together. She had no sense of taking liberties when she lifted it right up in her arms and carried it, after closing the door, into the innermost recesses of the tool-shed. She was too deeply agitated even to consider the wonder of its purring . . .

She felt about her for something to sit on, and found an upturned flower-pot. The cat nestled in her lap, purring still: now and then, changing its position, it projected into the darkness two blobs of amber-green.

For a few minutes Juliet ignored the possibility of invasion: the muffled sound of voices away on the tennis-court gave her a sense of security. But suddenly it was borne in upon her that she and the cat must get away. The urgency and complexity of the situation struck home. She sprang to her feet: now, this moment she must do something about protecting the cat, not only for the immediate present, but for always. Leslie would be coming—perhaps was on his way even now—to see the result of his plot. Fearfully, still clutching her precious burden, she stole to the door of the tool-shed and reconnoitered.

In front of her was the wall, invested with a new and momentous significance: it was the boundary between this place of evil, that once she had called home, and a region where, for all its forbidding mystery, there could be no doubt that righteousness prevailed. But if she let the cat go over by itself, what guarantee was there that it would not come again into these treacherous and sinister premises?

A few feet below the tool-shed was a door opening into a back lobby of the house. Juliet made for this, and hung about in the narrow passage till she could be sure that no one was on the stairs or in the hall beyond. Then she made a dash for the front door, down the short be-laureled drive and out into the avenue. Here she stopped in dismay, realizing the publicity of the open road. Suppose some one entering or leaving Ashtree Towers should come upon her, hatless, with the cat in her arms? Any one so finding her would certainly act as an enemy.

She moved along a few paces, hugging the wall that bounded Miss Tiverton's. In a moment or two she was close to the area steps; and, suddenly, her course became clear. At normal times she could scarcely have imagined seeking communication with a member of Miss Tiverton's household. But now she plunged headlong from the sunlit pathway down into the gray darkness of the un-

known. Confronted by that awful subterranean door, she realized her temerity, and tugged at the bell-pull in an access of sheer fright. Having done so, she stood shaking from head to foot, scarcely able to hold the cat who was now struggling in impatient desire to enter its rightful habitation.

The first thing that happened was a face at the kitchen window—that dour, creased, bespectacled face of which she had already caught occasional glimpses while its owner parleyed with tradesmen. It remained at the window for an appreciable number of seconds, expressive of surprise not unmixed with hostility. Only when the struggles of the cat became more pronounced did it slowly withdraw.

The next thing was a sound of footfalls approaching behind the area door—firm, heavy, unhurried footfalls. And in another minute the dingy green door opened on to a stocky, black-clad figure that seemed to exhale odors of beeswax and Irish stew. The cat, having freed itself with a frantic struggle and jump, disappeared down an avenue of darkness. Juliet stood there unaccompanied.

Miss Tiverton's housekeeper gazed perplexedly after the vanished cat: then she turned her head and eyed Juliet from top to toe. She did not say anything, and it seemed uncertain if she ever would.

"I brought the cat home," Juliet stammered, with her heart beating in her ears.

"So I see. And what happened, that you must needs break the bell?"

Break the bell! Had she really broken Miss Tiverton's bell? That indeed was the last word in catastrophe.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she gasped. "I didn't mean to break it—I didn't really."

"Well, well—that's a manner of speech. Perhaps there's no such great harm done. But what's supposed to be the matter with the cat?"

"There's nothing the matter with it . . ."

"Then why to goodness. Come, is this some silly monkey trick?"

Juliet, miserably twisting her fingers, said nothing.

The face pushed close to hers.

"You're from next door, aren't you?"

Juliet nodded.

"Well, miss," the rasping voice continued, "I can't stand here all the morning. If you've nothing to say——" And it was clear that in a moment the door would be closed.

Juliet made an effort.

"Please—I must tell you. The cat mustn't ever go outside Miss Tiverton's house and garden. Not *ever*."

"Well, of all the impudence! Miss Tiverton's cat can go where it pleases. If your people think, miss, that because they choose to plant themselves next door to Miss Tiverton, and spoil the neighborhood, and behave as if nobody hadn't any rights but themselves . . ."

"Oh, it isn't because the cat hasn't rights! I know it has: it's been here from time immemorial. But it's because it isn't *safe*."

Expression changed slowly on that rather wooden countenance. Now, very gradually, it grew intent and terrible; but there was something in it that absolutely prevented Juliet from running away.

"What do you mean, pray? Why isn't the cat safe?"

"Somebody t-tried to p-poison it."

"Who tried?"

There had not been in Juliet's upbringing, nor was there in her inherited traditions, very much of the nobility which involves obligation; and it was probably with a view to self-preservation rather than in loyalty to Leslie that she answered: "I shan't tell you."

Then suddenly she swayed, and put her hand up to the door-post. The fearful consequences that her defiance must otherwise have brought about were averted by her little wailing cry:

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"Sakes alive!" The housekeeper darted forward.
"Has some one been trying to poison *you*?"

But Juliet's dazed consciousness held only one item: she must not, could not, would not, be sick in Miss Tiverton's area. Turning swiftly, she compelled her tottering legs to carry her up the steps, and although she had an impression that the housekeeper was calling after her and beginning to follow her, she stumbled to the top and staggered at a fair pace along the hundred yards of road that lay between Miss Tiverton's back door and her father's gate.

CHAPTER III

ASHTREE TOWERS had all the appearance of being a "well-run" house. Casual visitors—and the Simpsons had many, despite Miss Tiverton's abstention—were unfailingly impressed, as it was intended that they should be, by the apparently automatic luxury that here prevailed. Where, with the servant difficulty daily on the increase, did Mrs. Simpson obtain her bevy of smart efficient maids? And how *restful* it was to come into a house that had every up-to-date convenience. And the cook! dinner guests would exclaim; why, she might be a *chef*. Very rare it was to find such a degree of civilization in the suburbs. Especially in Northmore, which, for all its delightful, cultured society ("Isn't it nice, dear Mrs. Simpson, to have added *the* Mr. So-and-So to our distinguished residents: what shall you do about calling?"), was always a little behind the times. Mr. Simpson's example, no doubt, would soon change all that, introducing a new ideal of living. After all, the poets and novelists and painters would not find their work suffer from a greater degree of material comfort. That poor little ramshackle house up near the heath, which Sir What's-his-name had taken for the sake of its studio, was enough to damp the greatest genius. What was it like inside? Oh, so Mrs. Simpson hadn't called yet? Nor had the speaker—hadn't quite liked to: people said that he and his wife were retiring, and one doesn't like to be intrusive. But the cook knew their housemaid, and there wasn't even a bathroom till they put a big bath into the attic. So delightful that people like Mr. and Mrs. Simpson should stir up the neighborhood, for really it had become rather stale in some ways, though of course it still held the cream of intellectual society, and was the only possible place to live in. London for those who wanted Society with a big S, but Northmore for those who cared about the

things of the mind and soul—Northmore, with its ancient and noble traditions. So charming to have Mr. and Mrs. Simpson among them. And *where* did she buy her coffee?

“No wonder she looks young,” some less fortunate woman had once been heard to remark. “Money can do even that.”

Certainly it had always been a tenet of the Simpsons that money could do everything within the province of material well-being. Nothing short of a disaster such as Juliet’s mysterious illness would have proved that there were things it wouldn’t do, so to speak, of its own accord. It would keep a machine in working order—that is, if you didn’t worry about it, but ladled it out to any one who asked for it in the quantities for which they asked; and, once there was a certain amount of it, there never seemed to be any real danger of its becoming less—though sometimes, when Mr. Simpson got fussy, you might, for the sake of peace, have to give up ices at dinner until he had quieted down again (not because ices were more expensive than anything else, but because they looked so). What money wouldn’t do, as now appeared, was to provide and keep working the kind of machine that would meet emergencies for you.

Mrs. Simpson had a large staff of servants, and never seemed to know, except quite vaguely, “which of them did what.” Enough that things got done. But now something had to be done which had never been done before, in this house anyhow—the nursing of Juliet; and it appeared that although Mrs. Simpson might not know what any individual maid did do, the individual maids knew quite well what they didn’t do, and what they hadn’t been engaged to do. They had not, apparently, been engaged *en masse* (as she had always comfortably assumed) for the collective task of seeing that Mrs. Simpson herself never had the slightest trouble or responsibility about anything whatever.

Faced, therefore, with an illness of Juliet’s which the

doctor could not diagnose, and that within a few days of the holidays, which couldn't be put off because the rooms were engaged, Mrs. Simpson retired—not to bed, exactly: that took such a lot of getting up from if anything interesting should happen—but to the couch in her bedroom, with a headache that prohibited her being disturbed.

Of the family life before they settled in Ashtree Towers Juliet remembered comparatively little. They had lived in a "good" house at Ealing, and there had been a certain amount of bickering and discontent. To Juliet the daily round of her mother and sisters had seemed exciting. They were constantly going into London—to restaurants and theaters and dances. She could not understand why Angela should say, in reference to these last: "Yes, subscription ones!" with so much bitterness. But they always seemed to find a fly in their ointment. Olive would keep remarking how funny it was that whenever they dined at the most expensive restaurant they knew of everybody who counted should go that particular night to one that was cheaper; or that the people who looked at you through opera glasses in the theater seemed to get more amusement out of you than you got out of them: or that it was no fun motoring through Mayfair in the height of the season, because the smart set who put up their lorgnettes at you in a traffic block were perfectly aware that you were only going to a charity bazaar. Observations of this kind always made Mrs. Simpson wince; but Olive kept on throwing them out, with a grim and pitiless satisfaction. And scarcely a day passed without Angela saying what a shame it was that father, now he could so well afford it, shouldn't let them live in a better part of London; to which Olive answered that that would only make things worse.

Of those days one episode in particular had impressed itself on Juliet; and it remained in her memory.

The domestic staff of the Ealing house was invariably in a state of flux. The servants who had been "treasures"

when they came (because they came) were never anything but good riddances when they left—with the exception of Clara Fairbanks. "Such a good-looking, efficient, well-set-up girl: so highly spoken of by Lady Somebody, in Bruton Street." Even Juliet could feel that something momentous had happened when Clara arrived. The rather jaded atmosphere that usually hung about Mrs. Simpson was pierced by a sudden freshness and light—a shy tentative hope. . . . "A maid like Clara," Juliet heard her mother say, "makes all the difference." Then Olive cut in with one of her blighting remarks: "Do you think the So-and-So's will call now there's Clara to open the door?" Mrs. Simpson merely answered that Olive didn't understand.

Mr. Simpson was away during the first few days of Clara's reign; and Mrs. Simpson became increasingly happy—finding, apparently, a new exhilaration in the details of her daily life. She ordered in masses of flowers each day from an expensive florist, and gave them to Clara to arrange: she breakfasted in bed because Clara would expect it: she rang the bell as often as she could invent an excuse for doing so; and she had seven courses at dinner. Clara was haughty and impenetrable; and her cold, bored way of saying, "Very well, madam," "As you wish, madam," was evidently music to Mrs. Simpson's ears. But a few hours after Mr. Simpson returned Clara's nose went into the air at an angle that was disconcerting even to her mistress. Mrs. Simpson ordered truffles in some dish at dinner; and next morning paid a round of visits to milliners and dressmakers. "Can't think where they're to go, Clara," she would say over her shoulder from the dressing-table, when the boxes were brought up in twos and threes. "Such a nuisance, all this shopping; but with the season coming on——"

In spite of it all, at the end of a week Clara gave notice.

Juliet happened to be in the room; and as the toneless incisive words were uttered, she saw her mother's solid

little figure gradually shrink and crumple and collapse into utter flabbiness.

“But Clara, surely you are comfortable?”

Clara didn't say she wasn't: it was just that the place didn't suit her.

Juliet looked and listened, open-mouthed. By some intuition she knew that her mother wouldn't leave it at that: it was a thing to fight about: Clara mustn't go—couldn't go. You might not understand the unique value of Clara, but you realized that she wouldn't be let go if anything on earth could prevail to keep her.

Questions, commands, even pleadings, failed for a long time to elicit the truth. Eventually, however, a change came over Clara's masked face: she ceased being an automaton, and looked at Mrs. Simpson as one woman may look at another. Disdain played about her pretty lips; but curiosity, very slightly tinged with compassion, was the dominant expression of her eyes.

“Well, Madam, if you will have it—though I should say it was a case of least said soonest mended—I've not been used to ladies whose mothers kept a 'Private and Commercial' at Kingston. No offense meant.”

Mrs. Simpson gasped, and stared at Clara in naked appeal. Clara respectfully turned to the door. Then her mistress jumped up.

“Clara,” she half sobbed, “surely you know that I am a member of Earl Templewood's family? It—it—I don't mind telling you, Clara, for I like and value you so very much—my dear father married beneath him.”

“They say that will happen, madam, even in the best families.”

“But surely, Clara, it makes a difference? To you, I mean—knowing that you are with a member of the aristocracy?”

“Well, madam, I don't know but what it might. But there's Mr. Simpson's trade-board up on a house in the next road but one, which of course I didn't know was this Mr. Simpson or I shouldn't never have come. So taking

everything all around, madam, I think if you please we'll say this day month, and sooner if you're suited."

There had never again been a Clara Fairbanks; but there had been potentially impertinent maids, in dealing with whom Angela and Olive each developed an effective "touch." Olive bounced at them and frightened them out of their wits: Angela raised her eyebrows and drawled at them in a way that made them sheepish. Mrs. Simpson cut a photograph of Templewood House out of an illustrated article on the *Beauties of England*, framed it, and hung it conspicuously in the drawing-room. The domestic upheavals became, for a time, less frequent. Once, when one of the girls congratulated her on this, Mrs. Simpson observed, with a droop of her lips and a swimmy look in her eyes, that it was all very well, but these maids were "not quite Clara."

When the lease of the Ealing house fell in it was not altogether easy to decide where they should live. Angela pressed for a London flat and a week-end "cottage." The idea was emphatically rejected by Mr. Simpson. It ran counter to his principles of expenditure: he believed in putting money "plump" into something that would yield a visible return. Flats and cottages were expensive luxuries with nothing to show for the cost. At first it seemed that there was no satisfactory solution of their problem. The country, without a *pied-à-terre* in town, must be out of the question till some distant future when Mr. Simpson should have retired from his business; and, while deprecating Olive's acid prophecy that life in Mayfair would prove even more tantalizing than life in Ealing, Mrs. Simpson and Angela conceded that nowadays, in London proper, you might get rather "swamped."

It was Olive who finally came to their rescue.

"What you want," she announced one day, "is to be somewhere where you can make yourselves felt."

Not a very nice remark, Mrs. Simpson manifestly thought; but Angela didn't challenge it, so she need not.

"Where would that be?" Angela asked, with sighing appeal.

"I suggest Northmore. Very cultured, very select. All the artists and people live in Northmore, and everything's beautifully mixed up. So many cliques that they've muddled their boundaries, and you can get in anywhere if you go the right way to work."

"How vulgar, dear Olive!" Mrs. Simpson was constrained to say. "As if we'd ever had any difficulty about getting in, as you call it. The trouble in London is to keep out of sets that are undesirable."

"You've got such a manageable little mind," said Olive affectionately.

But when, later, it transpired that by inhabiting the magnificent, newly-built Ashtree Towers they would acquire an almost feudal dignity, because the land it stood on and scores of adjoining acres actually belonged to Mr. Simpson, the problem really seemed to be solved. It would surely be unnecessary, at Ashtree Towers, to try to counteract Mr. Simpson. By all means let their neighbors know who he was; that the estate was his; that he was their landlord; that the very roads had in many cases been named at his desire. Speculating builder? Well, you could put it like that if you chose; but in Mr. Simpson's case it meant nothing short of a landowner on a large scale.

To Juliet, who had chanced sometimes to overhear these puzzling, grown-up conversations, the issue presented itself, vaguely, as a sort of triumph for her family—a vindication of splendid if mysterious rights from which some enemy had hitherto excluded them. Her idea was naturally confirmed by their impressive manner of comporting themselves at Ashtree Towers; but still, as she had occasionally reflected in private, things didn't seem to be quite satisfactory for them even now. No sooner had they settled in the new home, than trouble began, about the cat, and about Miss Tiverton not calling. These grievances had always seemed to go together; there were other cats in the

road—noisy ones too; but they didn't matter, because their owners had called.

Juliet was depressed—not only because something had happened to produce in her physical sensations the like of which she had never encountered or imagined; but also because of certain strangenesses in her bedroom. There was an extra chair; there was an old fur coat of her mother's thrown across the bed, making her uncomfortably hot: there was a medicine bottle on her dressing-table; and, above all, there was Olive.

So far as she could remember, Olive had never before been into her room except on tempestuous raids to borrow a clothes-brush or a button-hook; yet now she was sitting here in the borrowed armchair with every suggestion of permanence, notwithstanding signs in her demeanor of an inward restlessness. Sometimes her fingers would busy themselves over a bit of knitting—a blue silk thing that looked like a man's tie. Then she would throw it down, and fling her arms back over her head, and gaze out of the window with an expression that made her big features look even heavier than usual—though Juliet fancied that, if you could see, there would be something fiery and exciting in her great dark eyes. Then she would sigh, unfold her arms, and light a cigarette. (The first time she did this she had asked Juliet if cigarette-smoke would make her feel sick; and Juliet, incapable just then of speech, had shaken her head, wondering how Olive could think it possible for her to feel anything so ordinary as sick.) The cigarette finished, she would start humming softly—it was surprising how softly Olive, almost always noisy, could hum if she chose; then back, with increased energy, to the blue tie.

Well, she wasn't doing any harm there, exactly; but Juliet had an intense nostalgia for some state of things she could understand. Olive, and the fur coat, and the armchair, and the medicine bottle were sinister, taken all together: they must mean that something had happened,

or was going to happen. Then to make matters worse, her mother came in. Nor was that all: her mother wore (as Juliet saw through half-shut eyes, for it seemed better to pretend to be asleep) a garment called by her "negleege"—a garment which, worn in the daytime, meant that something had gone very wrong indeed.

Mrs. Simpson stepped nervously, as if she were afraid of springing a mouse-trap on the floor; glanced sidewise at Juliet's bed, in seeming uncertainty as to what she might find there; drifted toward it, touched the fur coat, withdrew hurriedly and finally dropped into the chair out of which Olive had rolled to a seat on the box-ottoman.

"She's asleep, isn't she?" said Mrs. Simpson in a loud whisper.

"Hope so," Olive answered.

In the Simpson family, if you were asleep, that was that: you wouldn't wake for mere talking. So when Mrs. Simpson spoke again it was with very little modification of her natural voice.

"Has anything been settled?" she asked.

"Not that I know of—except that the kiddy's got to stay in bed."

"I simply don't understand it, Olive—an illness that the doctor can't tell one anything about. I thought that was what doctors were for. But he seemed to think I should know—asked me so many questions that it made me quite giddy: what she'd been doing, and what she'd been eating, and I don't know what all."

"Very awkward for you," said Olive.

"Awkward? No, I don't know that it was awkward, exactly. Only tiresome. I simply said 'the same as usual' to everything he asked me.

"Anyhow, she won't be doing or eating the same as usual yet a while. And for once in her life she's got to be looked after. You can't leave it entirely to the servants."

"As if I didn't know that! You're making my head ache again. Of course, that's the whole trouble. I can't think why the maids have all suddenly become so busy.

I used to think they had plenty of leisure. We shall have to telegraph for Miss Anderson."

Olive sniggered. (Her mother had given up trying to cure her of that vulgar habit.)

"If you put Miss Anderson in charge, I'm afraid every one's summer holiday will be cut short by sudden death in the family."

Mrs. Simpson's face turned white, wherever the skin was free to do so.

"Death? My dear Olive, you don't really think the child's as ill as all that?"

"You missed the beginning of my sentence," said Olive patiently.

"Well, I'm sure I wish you wouldn't give me these horrid shocks. You might try to be a little helpful. If for some reason Miss Anderson won't do, you must think of something else." Then, as no suggestion was immediately forthcoming, a worried suspicious look appeared in Mrs. Simpson's face.

"You don't really think, do you, Olive, that it could possibly be my duty to throw you all over when the rooms are taken, and not go to Cromer? Because, if you do, I must say at once, that as *I* see it, my duty to my husband and my three elder children comes before my duty to the youngest; to say nothing of Angela needing a chaperon in the hotel."

"I don't think there's the very slightest doubt about your duty," Olive replied.

"What? You mean I must go to Cromer?"

"Not at all. Your duty is to stay with Juliet. But for the sake of every one concerned, specially Juliet, I strongly advise you not to do it."

"You do talk in such a silly way, always contradicting yourself. It may be clever, but it's not the sort of cleverness *I* admire. Anyhow, I take it you think I'd better go to Cromer. So who *is* to take charge?"

"The more pressing question is, who's to begin now, this minute, carrying up the white-of-egg she's supposed

to have every two hours? Who's to wash her and brush her hair and clean her teeth? Who's to fill her hot-water bottles? Who's to——"

"Olive, do please be quiet! I can't stand any more. You know I'm quite willing to pay any one to do anything. Go down-stairs and tell all the servants I'll give them an extra pound a week, or two pounds if they like, if they'll divide the work between them."

"Very difficult it would be to knock the pounds off again. The obvious always escapes you, mother. You must have in a nurse."

Mrs. Simpson's brow cleared.

"Yes, of course: it was rather stupid of me not to think of it." She pondered; and then, with sudden brightness (born, perhaps, of the discovery that she too could think of things), she flung a bombshell.

"Who would wait on the nurse?"

"Ah," said Olive wisely. "Perhaps you'd better engage another between-maid to do that."

Mrs. Simpson allowed herself a few moments' reflection.

"Who would the between-maid come between? You can't very well have two between-maids side by side. It isn't—it wouldn't be—what I mean is, there'd be nothing on one side for either of them to be between. They'd both be between together, and then they might——"

"Cancel out?" Olive suggested.

"I don't know, I'm sure. My head's awful."

"It's the effort of thinking such deep thoughts. Well, I'd better make some tracks toward getting the nurse. By the way, I'm not going to Cromer."

"*Not going! Why, your room's taken!*"

"I believe you'd pack up and go to Jericho, mother, if any one told you your room was taken there. I suppose granny was always great on the importance of keeping such engagements."

Mrs. Simpson recoiled. (Yet Olive never seemed to hurt like Clara.) "I do wish, dear, that you had an ounce or two of good taste in you. More like Angela."

“Angela and I are different altogether. I like granny, you know. I lament her decease. Something very snug about granny, there was.”

“How you can say so, considering you never saw her to remember . . .”

“That doesn’t matter. I know what she’d have been like. I’ve got an affinity with granny—just as much as Angela has with our esteemed and aristocratic grandsire. Well, I’m off.”

“Olive!” Her mother called her back in a tense and tremulous voice. “Olive! Wait a minute. I do want to say something. For—for Angela’s sake, I beg you not to talk in that thoughtless way to any one else. You must see——”

“I do see,” said Olive gravely.

“Well, then, *if* you see——”

“Don’t worry, mother. I can’t oblige you by having illusions, but I’m very good-natured.”

“And then, about this not going to Cromer?”

“You don’t mind, do you?”

“Well, I don’t understand it. And it may make things very difficult for me.”

“Oh—how?”

“You know what your father’s like in hotels—how he quarrels with the servants and makes bothers in the office. I”—Mrs. Simpson was undoubtedly flushing under her cosmetics—“I get rather uncomfortable sometimes, Olive, when people turn and look to see what’s going on.”

Olive nodded.

“What difference do *I* make, though?”

“Only—only that you mind, too. And you can smooth him over, somehow. Angela——”

“What about Angela?”

“Angela’s a daughter any mother would be proud of. But she—it’s so difficult to put it. What I mean is, she doesn’t mind people looking at us for *any* reason.”

Olive chuckled. Then, impulsively, she came back into the room, bent over her mother’s chair and kissed her.

“Grandpapa did you a rotten bad turn by marrying granny.”

“Well, I know he robbed me of my heritage.”

“That he did—such a cozy, peaceful, ‘pub’-keeping heritage, with none of these nasty little jabs and worries that make your life a burden to you.”

“Are you being rude?” asked Mrs. Simpson feebly.

“P’raps. It depends on the point of view. Well, mother, I’m sorry about Cromer, but I dare say Angela’s languid beauty will see you through. Anyway, I’m sure I ought to stay and keep Juliet’s nurse in order.”

“But, my *dear* child! When we shall be paying her whatever she asks! Why, I thought of giving her something extra for writing to us every day.”

“All the same, I’m staying.”

“There’s a very sweet, unselfish side to you, Olive. But——”

“There’s another side too,” Olive interposed quickly. “Both have to do with my not going to Cromer.”

Once more she was summoned back from the threshold.

“Olive—I oughtn’t to have said that about your father. Of course, it’s quite proper that he should make a to-do when things don’t suit him. It’s only what would be expected from a personage like him, paying his way so handsomely . . .”

“Bless you, mother! It would never do if he didn’t! People might think he was just a common tradesman.”

“Oh, no, they couldn’t think that—with his distinguished appearance. Olive” (getting up), “I think after all you’d better stay here. Juliet might wake. I’ll go and ask Caroline to telephone to—what is it? Mrs. Hunt’s? Or Whitley’s? Oh, the Trained Nurses’ Institute. I don’t know if I shall remember that, but I’ll call you if I find I’ve forgotten. I don’t think Caroline minds telephoning, do you?”

Olive flopped back into the vacated chair and lighted another cigarette. She started when Juliet spoke to her.

"Isn't it funny me being ill, Olive?"

"A screaming farce," said Olive laconically.

"Olive, why does mother like grandpapa better than granny?"

Olive scraped her chair round on its casters and faced the bed. The corners of her broad mouth twitched.

"Don't you know, kiddy?"

"Not exactly." Juliet pushed back the hair from her burning forehead. "Clara Fairbanks said something when she gave warning. I'd forgotten till now. It was ever so long ago, when I was little. Something about mother's mother keeping a com—com—commercial somewhere. I don't know what it meant, or where she kept it. P'raps it was at Earl Templewood's house—I forget really. But I know they spoke as if granny oughtn't to have done it."

When she had recovered from a paroxysm of noisy laughter, Olive puffed once or twice at her cigarette.

"I don't see why you shouldn't know," she said then. "Granny was in humble life: she kept a 'pub' of sorts. Grandpapa was the grandson of a belted earl."

Juliet's eyes opened very wide.

"Was he *really*, Olive? A *belted* earl?" (That must be the very most exciting kind of all, like a hooded cobra.)

"And don't you ever forget it," said Olive grimly.

"Oh no, I never shall," Juliet assured her.

Silence again; then, rather weakly, from Juliet:

"It comes all right about the betweens, Olive. The nurse would make it right. One on each side of her, and then one on each side of them . . ."

"Go to sleep!" Olive commanded.

But Juliet knew that she couldn't go to sleep: there was such a tremendous lot to think about.

CHAPTER IV

SHE cared less and less about the unpunctuality of her white-of-egg. True, she felt empty inside, and there was a singing in her ears and a burning in her head. But, except for the emptiness and the singing and the burning (to which white-of-egg made no difference), she might not have had a body at all.

She felt happier when at last Olive had gone, and the late July day had faded into dusk, and the top of the ash tree, which she could see from her bed, made moving patterns against the flame color of the western sky, and she knew that the sun was coming down where he could look in at Miss Tiverton's front windows and bid her a respectful good night as he passed on his way to the other side of the world.

If she had no body, neither had she a house—nothing to separate her in any way from the cat, who now, in this deep twilight, would be sitting on top of the ivied wall—gazing, gazing, with its great moon-eyes. In a sense, she had forgotten her own recent dealings on behalf of the cat; or, if they were not actually forgotten, at least they were merged in the stupendous fact of its triumphant, timeless existence. When the sun went down and the evening star flickered into being all the world outside Miss Tiverton's belonged to Juliet and the cat. It didn't make any difference, to-night, that she wasn't actually seeing the cat—gazing, gazing, with its great moon eyes. She knew only what it knew, saw only what it saw. What the cat saw would be time immemorial. Certainly, it saw little things that belonged to "at present"—like milk and haddocks' tails; but no doubt there had always been milk and haddocks' tails, for ever and ever . . .

That evening star smelled sweet and fresh and cool through the open window; a tiny breeze brought in the smell, and spilled it over Juliet's face, stirring the hair on

her forehead. . . . She drew a long breath, and slid away out into the deep gloaming that was almost darkness. But it wasn't really too dark to see; otherwise the cat wouldn't have been looking. . . . In fact, it was lighter when you got outside—with a curious, clear, suffused lightness that could have been either twilight or dawn. There was no one in sight: there were no houses except Miss Tiverton's; none even on the crest of the low hills across the dip—only a wavy line, very clear-cut against the pallid light, that thrilled you with a sense of "beyondness." Under your feet was soft, long, untidy grass, full of dandelions. You could walk as far as you liked, away from Miss Tiverton's: the rank grass and the dandelions went on until you reached the coppice down a road, that was all muddy and unmade, at the far end of Ashtree Avenue. Only there wasn't really an Ashtree Avenue, or any (even an unmade) road: those came out of a dream.

But you wouldn't want to go farther in that direction: you would want to keep in sight of the gate in the ivied wall. For in time immemorial there was a gate—opening straight on to the dandelioned grass. The top half of it was made of iron bars through which you could look. . . . Sometimes the witch-woman passed behind the bars: sometimes she would stop and shake a bony finger at you; but she was never really unkind, and if the cat happened to be on your side of the gate she would show her yellow teeth in a queer but not unfriendly grin. Sometimes the house-keeper would come and open the gate, and look round for Juliet and the cat.

"Miss Tiverton," she might say, "wants the white-of-an-egg."

You went to London for the white-of-an-egg. It was a tremendous distance off, up-hill and down-dale, with never a soul to meet on the way. The cat went in front of you, its tail held very high. At last you found London, making a terrible noise in a valley deeper than the valley which Ashtree Towers overlooked. It was all black and busy, like a pond of tadpoles. You came upon it suddenly, and could

hardly hear your own voice for the din. You stopped still, and called out as loud as you could: "Miss Tiverton wants the white-of-an-egg."

But no one heard, till the cat arched up its back, and made its eyes twice as big as before, and yelled so that London couldn't help hearing. . . . Then there was no more noise at all: every one ran hither and thither searching for eggs, till they had found more than you could carry back.

And sometimes the ogre would come to the gate.

"Miss Tiverton wants meadow-sweet," he would say, "to put in her vases."

For meadow-sweet you went another way—crossed the bit of waste ground, and climbed up and up a green slope, and went over that wavy line down into the beyond. The light there was not so cool: it was more like afternoon. White rabbits and goldy-brown guinea-pigs played and fed in the long grass, and peacocks were strutting in what seemed like the sun. But you didn't wait about there, because Miss Tiverton was expecting the meadow-sweet; and, anyhow, the cat wouldn't let you. It marched always in front, till at last you came into a very hot little wood. There were lawns in the wood, and it was full of the most wonderful wild-flowers like you saw in picture-books about Switzerland. But these were not what Miss Tiverton wanted, and you went on till you came to a pond or lake so full of weeds and things that you didn't know it was water till your feet sloshed in. There was a buzzing and a singing everywhere, made by winged insects, and a croaking made by frogs. And all round the margin of the sloshy place there was meadow-sweet, smelling so that it turned you dizzy. You picked and picked, and laid the slender stems across your arm, and went on picking while the cat waited placidly, patting for fun at the shimmering blue dragon-flies.

And it took so long to get back that when again you saw the ivied wall it was nearly as dark as it could be in time immemorial. A red light glowed in the witch-woman's

window, and the ogre yawned as he took the meadow-sweet in through the gate. And the cat sprang on to the wall, and lifted its head, and wailed and bellowed till it had fetched up its friend the moon.

“That wretched beast, and that miserable old woman!”

The cat was wailing still, but for another reason. It wailed because the star was lost—blotted out by a solid blackness. The blackness had shape: it was a column, quite straight at first glance; but when you had looked longer you saw that it had curious unevenness, curves and indentations. The top of it was a knob. When you had looked longer still, the shape seemed to be that of a human being.

Juliet tried, though vainly, to sit up. Then the column moved; but there was no time for the star to come back. Another light took the field—a hard, garish, all-enveloping light, in which other lights dwindled to nothing; a light that made you wince and shut your eyes.

“Thought you weren’t asleep.”

So the column had been Olive. And the voice must have been hers, too—the voice that had said such disquieting things.

“They aren’t really wretched and miserable,” Juliet murmured. “It’s only because you shut out the star.”

Olive came close to the bed, looked into Juliet’s face, laid a large hand on her brow.

“Dreaming or wandering?” she said as if to herself. “Come, kiddy, there’s some stuff here for you to drink.”

In another minute the room was full of people. Juliet’s mother was there, looking more lovely and actressy than ever, in her spangled evening dress that was good enough for a ball; and a dark person in a dark straight cloak, a white collar and a bonnet. They talked a great deal, but Juliet did not hear what they said. She was listening to the cat.

At last her mother said something in a voice so shrill that you couldn’t make yourself deaf to it:

“For mercy’s sake, Olive, shut the window. That disgraceful animal will drive us all mad.”

The sash window came down with a bang—and still the wailing went on, but now it was fainter than the voices.

“I’m sure I don’t know, nurse, how your poor little patient is ever to get any sleep. Night after night it goes on, and we’ve complained till we’re sick and tired of it. And what do you think is the latest on the part of our neighbor?”

“Impossible to say what neighbors will do,” the nurse replied briskly, as she removed her cloak and bonnet.

“Why, only to-day she sent round the most insolent note saying—what did it say exactly, Olive?”

“Nothing much—unless it was between the lines. Something about some one having designs on her cat.”

“Well, anyhow, I know your father thought it might be actionable.”

“Pretended to think so, you mean. I couldn’t help wondering from his manner——” Olive broke off and giggled.

“What’s ‘actionable!’” said Juliet’s weak voice.

Her mother turned to her.

“Oh, it means—how would you put it, Olive?”

“Something you call in the police about, or a solicitor, or somebody.”

“Why would father call in the police about having a letter from Miss Tiverton?”

“He wouldn’t,” Olive answered, still unaccountably amused.

“He wouldn’t condescend to,” Mrs. Simpson declared. “I’m sure I can’t be too thankful that we never called. Not the sort of person you *would* call on. That letter was written in a most uneducated hand.”

Olive, who sat on the end of the bed, where her large form would be least in the nurse’s way, looked up sharply.

“Nonsense, mother! You know quite well she didn’t write it herself.”

“Didn’t she? How do you know?” Mrs. Simpson rejoined nervously. Then, with a flash of spirit: “Anyhow, I’m not used to receiving dictated letters—and in the third person, too. It’s not the sort of thing I expect. People do it only to inferiors. My dear grandfather——”

“Great-grandfather,” Olive interposed.

The nurse had emptied her bag of its contents.

“Now, Mrs. Simpson and Miss Simpson, I think if you’ll be good enough to leave me with my patient——”

Juliet liked and admired the nurse, but did not find her easy to talk to. Yet it would have been nice to talk to some one who sat so reposefully by the window (being short, she never blocked out the sky), with her neat white-and-brown head bent over needlework or a book. Some one, moreover, who liked sitting there: she must like it, for whenever mother or Angela called to her from under the window to come down and enjoy the garden because they were going out she always shook her head and made an excuse. It was the same even when Angela invited her to look at the frocks and hats she was packing for Cromer; the same when mother asked her to come and chat in the boudoir because she had such a dreadful headache, and she was sure nurse could help her take her mind off it a little. Nurse invariably said that if they didn’t mind she would rather stay with her patient.

Of course, she did go out for an hour or two in the day—at a time when Juliet was supposed to be asleep; and she absented herself for her meals in the schoolroom—intervals of which Juliet was glad. But, on the whole, she wanted the nurse to be there more often than not: her grave pretty face was more interesting to look at than the wall-paper, and her presence made the room even quieter than it was without her. It gave Juliet a comfortable, “protected” feeling; though she could not have said exactly why there was a need of protection. It had nothing to do with Olive: she rather liked Olive, except at moments; and the others seldom or never came near her.

Only there was this difficulty of not knowing quite what to say. Neither her mother nor her sisters would have felt it, she was sure; so now and then she tried to think of the things that they would say.

"Have you been shopping in the sales, nurse? I hear there are some very good bargains to be had this year."

Nurse didn't even look up from her embroidery.

"Nurses don't have to do much shopping," she said.

"But I s'pose you sometimes want new aprons and things," Juliet persisted. "And I 'spect you could get them very cheap in the sales."

Nurse said no more at all. Well, it didn't matter. Juliet had done her best. She nearly shut her eyes, leaving just enough of them open to see, in the hot blue sky, a funny, white, papery moon all reversed and sliced off in the wrong place. And then, somehow or other, she and the cat were wandering up-hill and down-dale, over green swards with heat-haze dancing on the feathery, sweet-smelling grass-heads, in the direction of London, where they were to buy for Miss Tiverton in the sales one of those very tall pointed hats with a long white veil hanging from it, like all the ladies wore. . . .

Once when nurse was absent, Angela drifted in to see her. Her coming caused Juliet a little shock of surprise, not unpleasant in its nature. She was sometimes fascinated by watching Angela, though, curiously enough, she could never remember anything she had said to Angela nor anything that Angela had said to her. They had been, of course, dimly aware of each other; they had sometimes, perhaps, irritated each other, but only by such accidents as colliding on the stairs or leaving open a door that the other wanted shut. Moreover, it was possible for them, in the closest physical proximity, to have as little cognizance of each other's entity as would a squirrel and a guinea-pig dumped together in their owner's lap.

Angela, however, if you cared to take note of her, was objectively interesting. You could wonder about her. You could tell yourself the amazing fact that

she had not always existed in her present form; that she had once been, as in that photograph in the drawing-room, a girl of Juliet's age, with loose falling hair confined across her forehead by a straight band of ribbon, with rather swollen-looking cheeks, and a much bigger mouth than she had now; and, more marvelous yet, that she had once been a fat unclothed baby, grinning from ear to ear, and holding a single lily against her podgy shoulder. Very strange, that. How *could* Angela have got on without clothes? She wouldn't have been able to sink down, or recline, or sweep, or glimmer, or glide. . . . But perhaps babies didn't need to do those things.

And how dreadful it must have been for her when she was too short to look into glasses. Angela never came into a room without going first to—no, she didn't ever “go” anywhere, in the sense of using legs: she never visibly used her legs: she just seemed to find herself at places—so it would be truer to say that she never found herself in a room without finding herself, immediately, at the glass. She was there now, at Juliet's, and her fingers were moving gently among the few articles on the dressing-table—feeling about, opening things. She had forgotten, if she ever knew, that Juliet did not use a powder-puff.

And then she found herself in the borrowed armchair, her soft light draperies fallen into the most entrancing folds about her scented person, her gossamer hair set off by a dark cushion which had somehow transferred itself from the box-ottoman in order to produce that effect, her little beautifully-shod feet peeping from under the muslin skirt as if they deprecated their own smallness, her slender manicured hands playing in her lap with some sort of trinket she wore at the end of a long chain. And she gazed at Juliet.

Juliet returned the gaze, very steadily and fully. She was not thinking of any purpose there might be in Angela's visit; of anything that Angela might be about to say. She was thinking of the queer sensation it gave you to look into Angela's eyes.

They were very big, gray-green eyes, and at first glance you would say they were very deep. You would say that if you looked into them hard enough you must find something; just as if you opened a door or a window on to the darkest night you would certainly begin to see things you could recognize—shapes that became gradually more definite, or a star which, once you had found it, could never be lost again. Yet, strain your own eyes as you would to find what there might be in Angela's, you still met blankness—a great mystery of blankness such as no darkness could produce, but only a thick fog. . . . And the blankness dazzled you. And sometimes you thought it was shifting, wearing thinner, paler, and that in a moment something would emerge: then the pall thickened, having taken on a slightly different hue.

Angela spoke. The sound of her voice had no more beginning than the ripple of a brook: it was a question of when you noticed it.

“I wondered, dear, if you would like to see a clergyman?”

Juliet, not easily, withdrew her attention from the eyes; considered this remark, found it interesting.

“What clergyman?” she said.

“Well, of course, it doesn't really matter *what* one. But it's usual, when you're ill.”

“Is it?” said Juliet. “I didn't know.”

“I am sure I should want to, myself.”

“Would you?” Juliet's interest was thoroughly established. “What one would you want to see?”

“I think perhaps, in this neighborhood, Mr. Lethbridge. Of course, the vicar is a very good man. But I think, in spiritual matters, Mr. Lethbridge is wonderfully understanding. And I feel he is more our sort.”

“I do like Mr. Lethbridge,” said Juliet, recalling to her mind's eye a young, handsome and very jolly curate who had several times been to tea.

“Yes—you would feel, as I do, that it is easier to talk to some one who shares our *traditions*. The vicar is per-

haps a shade—well, never mind. But the Lethbridges are a county family. Mr. Lethbridge's mother knows Cousin Maud."

Which was more than the Simpsons did; and to know some one who knew, or whose mother knew, Cousin Maud was wonderfully suggestive. Suppose the next miracle should be getting to know some one whose mother knew Miss Tiverton? Juliet suddenly tingled with excitement. Suppose Mr. Lethbridge's mother—no, his mother's cousin or second cousin: you couldn't hope for it to be nearer than that—*should* know Miss Tiverton?

"Do—do Mr. Lethbridge's relations live near?" she stammered.

"I told you, his is a county family. Their place is only about twenty miles from Templewood House."

Juliet's face fell.

"Don't even any of his *far* relations live near?"

"I think I have heard him mention some sort of a connection living in this neighborhood. But why? What has that to do with it?"

"Not anything," said Juliet absently. A drift of dun-colored smoke from the witch-woman's chimney was dispersing itself into the blue sky opposite her window.

"Well?" murmured Angela—perhaps after a long silence: Juliet didn't know. "*Would* you like to see Mr. Lethbridge? Because, if you would, I will go and ask him at once—he would be at home for lunch—and explain to him all about your being so ill."

Juliet roused herself as the words penetrated.

"Yes, *please*," she answered emphatically. "I do dreadfully want to see Mr. Lethbridge; unless—unless you think it would do as well if I saw his connection?"

A shadow of expression stole into Angela's face: a little more, and it might have been called a frown.

"But I think it's a woman; and women are never clergymen. And, anyhow, why should you prefer some one else to Mr. Lethbridge? Still, of course, if you *don't* want to see him I won't go and ask."

"Please, Angela, I *do!* I want to see him very much indeed—if you think nurse wouldn't mind?"

"Nurses can't interfere with a patient's religious duties." Angela consulted her jeweled wrist-watch. "I'll put on my hat and go at once."

Had she really been a solid body, Olive would have bumped into her on the threshold. Angela, however, was borne smoothly backward into the room.

"*You* here!" exclaimed Olive in that so different voice which not only began but made you jump at its beginning.

"It's most frightfully kind of Angela," Juliet said, too much excited to note that in the gray-green orbs suddenly turned upon her the shifts of fog were replacing each other with unwonted swiftness. "She's going to ask Mr. Lethbridge to come to see me."

Olive remained very square and stolid on the threshold. After a moment she sniggered.

"You idiot!" she said to Angela. "I've just met him and asked him in for tennis this afternoon."

At the term of opprobrium Angela had seemed to droop like a flower under rain; then, imperceptibly, she trembled back into uprightness and enhanced perfection.

"I see," she murmured. "So, perhaps, I need not trouble . . ."

"No, and you needn't trouble Juliet either. The best thing you can do is to take him into the summer-house some time and have Doubts."

What were Doubts? Did you have them off a frosted plate with a spoon? Juliet didn't ask her sisters, because they might have laughed at her for not knowing; but she could get Mr. Lethbridge to tell her when he came.

Curiously enough, however, he didn't come—at least, not to see her, though she heard him calling out cheerily on the tennis-court. . . . Anyhow, the cat would know. It wouldn't, of course, tell her in words, but it would probably take her to where they were. If they were very nice Miss Tiverton might want some.

Perhaps it was the second or third night after nurse's arrival (time no longer ticked, but slid imperceptibly) that Juliet discovered why her protection had been needed. Yet when the need came, she was not there: otherwise it could not—at any rate it would not—have arisen. Nurse had gone to her supper, and had considerably turned off the electric light so that Juliet could possess whatever the open window gave her. Outside it was almost dark—very still and very warm. The star was bigger than usual, and its smell indistinguishable from that of the lime-blossom on a tree in Miss Tiverton's garden. Some baby owls were learning to hoot. They lived at Miss Tiverton's, but Juliet always hoped that some night they would glide across to the ash tree. She had a sense, too, though she could not see them, of bats circling near by and noiselessly fanning the night. She had a stronger sense of the cat majestic on the wall, absorbed, as she was, in sights and sounds, and piercing the deep gloaming with its luminous green orbs. . . . She listened eagerly, and in a few minutes it lifted up its voice. She heaved a sigh of content: the windows, the walls, the furniture, the bed began to slip away from her, dissolving in the magic air of another world. . . .

But the process did not complete itself. There still remained, close beside her, a door which could be opened; and with the opening came unrest, conflict, bewilderment, as two worlds clashed. She didn't want nurse back yet . . .

It wasn't nurse. Juliet couldn't see who it was, and she put her hand across her eyes, dreading the onslaught of harsh light which would show her the intruder. But the door closed quietly, and the light didn't come. So she looked again. A dark massive form stood by her bed.

“Well, Juliet, getting along?”

Her father. It was his first visit, but she certainly had not missed him; and she wondered now why he had come.

“I'm all right, father.”

He hadn't, apparently, expected an answer: he had gone straight to the window. There was more light left in the sky than she had realized, for she could see every line of his substantial person. It was much worse than Olive's shoulder: It blotted out not only the star, but all the lovely liquid opal and amber in which the star floated.

He was holding a long-shaped thing that glinted.

He stood very still. He seemed to be looking for something but there was nothing out there that he could possibly want to see. Juliet knew exactly what there was—much less, of course, since his coming, for now there would be only the garden, instead of time immemorial. The cat was silent—waiting, no doubt, till he should be pleased to go.

Her eyes filled with peevish tears. It was horrible, having him in her room; and as the moments passed she felt more and more strongly that he had no right to be there. Try as she would to forget the nightmare episode which had preceded her illness—that episode which, simply through being remembered, acquired a vivid and menacing reality; determine as she would to hush it up even in her own mind, and let her family go on wondering why she was ill—yet now the whole truth of the matter, beginning with those furtive proposals to which her father had listened, rose up and clamored against his presence. How dared he stand at her window, looking down upon the cat? It seemed, too, that he would never, never go. . . .

At last, quite suddenly, the cat lost patience—lost it very badly. It screeched at him in a way that made even Juliet nearly jump out of her skin; and the screech lengthened into a howl of fury.

Her father raised the glinting thing, and did something with it—something that made silence. Every pulse in Juliet's body was hammering loud enough to deafen her—but for all her deafness she heard the silence—terrible silence that charged the room—silence that only became the more monstrous when her father broke it with a

laugh. It was then that Juliet, for no reason she had time to be aware of, gave vent to a scream that seemed to disintegrate her being. Again she screamed, and again, beating the coverlet with hands over which she had no control. Then, all in a minute, the lights were up and the room was full of people. She clutched at the bedclothes and pulled them over her head so that at least there should be darkness, even if only the hot stuffy darkness that bedclothes made. She stopped her ears, to shut out that silence that was rendered more and more audible by the babel of human voices around her. And she sobbed until her sides ached beyond endurance.

Some one began pulling and plucking at the bedclothes above her. But she grabbed at them and held on to them (though it meant unstopping her ears) with fingers that had suddenly acquired the strength of steel.

At last one clear cold voice dominated the rest.

"Kindly go at once—all of you."

Then her father's, very sulky:

"Look here, nurse, the child must be demented. I only——"

"Please go out of the room, Mr. Simpson."

Juliet did not resist the hands which finally extricated her from the tangled bedding. And she said nothing while certain things were being deftly done—her forehead dabbed with eau-de-cologne and water, her lips moistened with some cool drink, her pillows patted and rearranged. She thought she would never speak again—never stop crying, though it made her ache so dreadfully.

"Something frightened you?" said nurse gravely.

After all, it was possible to get out some words: they wanted to come—insisted on coming.

"*Could* father be the devil?"

Nurse didn't answer at once: she was shaking a thermometer.

"What has happened to make you think that?"

Juliet's twitching lips with difficulty framed the answer.

“He’s killed the cat!”

“I don’t think so,” nurse replied.

“He *did!*” (The sobs grew stronger.) “He shot it with a gun.”

“Oh, no. That was only a garden-syringe,” said nurse quietly. “He may perhaps have wetted the cat, but I should think even that is very unlikely.”

From outside, in the night, came a sardonic howl.

CHAPTER V

“OF COURSE, this is great waste of your time.”

That was the doctor speaking: nurse had followed him out on the half-landing, leaving the door ajar.

“Yes, Doctor, I feel that.”

“Is there really no one, in a household like this, to do the little that’s necessary?”

“The family are just going away. And anyhow——”

“The second Miss Simpson tells me she is staying at home. But I suppose that wouldn’t help?”

“Not much, I fancy,” said nurse; “though it would be better than the other one . . .”

“Well, I suppose you can regard yourself as doing a work of charity.”

“Not with a good grace, I’m afraid. One feels all the time like an object of charity.”

Then there came a curious sound, as if the doctor were laughing and trying not to. He said good-by cheerily, and his footsteps died away down the stairs.

When nurse came back into the room her face had a rather hard look. She did not say anything to Juliet, but, after tidying up a few things on the wash-stand and dressing-table, took her needlework and seated herself by the window. For once her presence did not seem companionable and protective: it made for Juliet an unwonted loneliness, a bewilderment, an atmosphere, even, of something like disgrace. She lay still for a long time, watching the nurse; and gradually a hot feeling came about her eyes, then the stinging uprush of tears. But she blinked them away.

“Please, nurse,” she said at last, “don’t you like being here?”

Nurse didn’t even raise her head to answer.

“What I like doesn’t matter. It’s a case of duty.”

"You can have anything you want," Juliet pleaded, "if it doesn't bother the servants. Mother said so to Olive. She said you could finish the almond-iced cake after they've gone: it makes Olive feel sick. And she said you could have a little drive in the two-seater if Olive would take you. The big car and Mason are going to Cromer. And she said you could be in the garden ever so much more, as Olive's generally out."

Surely nurse wouldn't be so unkind as not to answer? If she didn't, those tears would certainly come. And it seemed that she wasn't going to. But after a moment she laid her work in her lap, and, lifting her head, looked straight at Juliet.

"Do you think," she said, "that you will ever go to school?"

"I don't know," Juliet answered, wondering. "Miss Anderson teaches me now. But father said once I ought to go, and get woke up."

"Well, if your parents are ever willing, I should go, if I were you. And make friends all you can—not only with the rich well-dressed girls, but with any one who seems nice. And go to their houses, if they ask you."

"I don't know any girls really," said Juliet, all tendency to weeping banished by this friendly topic. "Except Meta Small, when we lived in Ealing. I liked her rather, but mother said she hadn't any breeding. Her father was hat-polish, and we only knew them because they came to live next door. Mother called before she knew about the hat-polish. Nurse——" Here she paused, realizing that if she went on she would, in a moment, have raised her listener to the rank of a friend. But, after all, why not? "Nurse, don't you think it's awfully 'strordinary that Miss Tiverton's never called?"

A very odd expression flitted over the nurse's face.

"Well, perhaps the old lady has her reasons."

"You'd think any one would want to know *us*," Juliet persisted. "My grandfather's grandfather was a belted earl."

Perhaps nurse felt a draught from the window, though it was funny to shiver on such a hot day.

"So I've heard," was all she said.

The departure of Juliet's nurse soon followed that of her family: she had become obviously unnecessary. Not that Juliet was restored, in a moment, to health: she still needed care, and must be kept for the greater part of the day in bed. But it appeared that she could be "nursed," and could have been all the time, without professional aid. The first intimation of this came from the cook, during a morning interview with Olive.

"I've nothing to say against the nurse, miss—she don't give near the trouble they some of them do. But there's all this getting a extra set of meals and carrying up a extra set of trays, and it wouldn't take half so much of the girls' time to look after Miss Juliet theirselves, and Caroline says the same and so does Agnes. For she's not really ill now, not to say ill, Miss Juliet isn't."

Whether this willingness to "look after Miss Juliet theirselves" had really existed all the time, or whether it was just the result of a calmer and more humane temper induced by their mistress's absence, were questions impossible to answer. Anyhow, Olive dismissed the nurse, whose face lighted, for an instant, with relief and satisfaction.

Juliet, of course, felt lonely. She liked the servants, and would have been specially glad to make friends with the cook, who sometimes spoke to Miss Tiverton's housekeepers; but if you talked to servants (so she had often heard her mother say) they ceased to respect you. She therefore accepted their attentions in dignified silence, with the result that these attentions were speedily reduced to a minimum. Still, she was getting a little stronger, and could do some things for herself: moreover, a new and unexpected intimacy with Olive brought compensating interest into her life.

After the first week of their tête-à-tête, she had already

seen more of Olive than of any single member of her family hitherto; and Olive had become, decidedly, something more than a mere accident of her environment—something more, even, than a “character.” Not a friend: she would surely never be quite that. A friend, in Juliet’s conception (based on her experience of Meta Small, and, for those few days, of the nurse) was a person to whom you could tell things; and it seemed impossible that you could ever tell things to Olive. You could, of course, tell her that your hot-water bottle was cold, and the chances were that, if she remembered, it would be attended to; but you couldn’t tell her real things, like adventures with the cat in time immemorial. She would laugh, and her laugh was as ugly as her singing voice was beautiful. But you could listen to Olive—for hours and hours. She was never dull: mostly she was exciting. Even if you didn’t understand all she said, you felt nevertheless that worlds were opening round you; and through the fog of unintelligible phrases you could get glimpses into matters that you had never before known or even wondered about. And in this enlargement of your vision Olive herself became a much more complete and living personality.

It had never occurred to Juliet that her sister could be unhappy. Even for herself, unhappiness was a condition hardly recognized. There were disappointments, of course, and little sadnesses like the nurse going; and, very occasionally, horrible things happened, like the discovery that your men-folk were wicked. But, for all you knew, everybody’s fathers and brothers might be wicked. Anyhow, either you could alter these things, or you could not. If in some particular instance they mattered very much to you personally, at least you could always scream; and if you screamed loud enough and long enough somebody usually did something. Fortunately, however, other people, and their ways of going on, as a rule had nothing to do with you, so that you needn’t take much notice.

But evidently with Olive it was different. Olive grumbled at things in general for being as they were,

which must mean that they could be otherwise—a possibility that had never presented itself to Juliet.

When her sister first began to talk to her there seemed to be no hope of understanding. For one thing, she had a way of leaving her sentences unfinished—except for a morose look as cryptic as her curtailed speech. It was very tantalizing, this sense of there being something always about to come, which for some reason Olive at the last moment decided had better not come. . . . But that only endured for about twenty-four hours.

“I really don’t see why you shouldn’t know things,” she eventually said, in a tone of annoyance, as if Juliet had objected to knowing.

“I *want* to know things,” Juliet declared.

“Well, then—you must see how it is. . . . A perfectly wretched state of existence, I call it—don’t you?”

What was a “state of existence”? How could you be sure if it was wretched or not until you knew? Yet Juliet wanted to agree and, even more, wanted not to seem stupid. She racked her brains: it must, she thought, be something that belonged to Olive herself, or she wouldn’t be so upset about it. So she said tentatively:

“You mean yours?”

“Well, it’s yours too—or will be some day. I suppose you’re too young to see——”

“Yes,” said Juliet hopefully, “I think I am.”

“Then I’m sure the sooner you learn the better. You’ll thank me one day. But don’t blab to mother.”

Juliet did not know what “blab” meant, and was able to give assurances.

“We’re shams,” Olive said. “And we don’t take anybody in, which makes it worse.”

Juliet eagerly rammed the first sentence into a pigeon-hole in her mind: it wanted an awful lot of thinking out. She knew what a sham was, but didn’t see how any person or people could be it. The last remark was the one to answer. “I should think that would make it not matter”—she said—“our not taking anybody in.”

"Oh, you think so, do you? Perhaps you like being sneered at and cold-shouldered."

"No, I *shouldn't* like it, Olive, I'm sure. But I don't think any one's done it to me."

"Only because nobody so far's had the chance. Besides, it isn't true. That nurse of yours had her nose always in the air. It might have been different if she'd come after the others were gone: I think *I* could have got on with her—but she saw through *them* like glass."

Juliet was getting hopelessly bewildered. Perhaps it would be better to tell Olive honestly that she didn't know what it was all about.

"Olive, I 'speat I'm most frightfully stupid, but I didn't understand the beginning. How can *people* be shams?"

"Why, you infant, by trying to pretend they're what they're not—making themselves out very smart and grand and well-connected, when really they're nothing at all."

"But, Olive—grandfather's grandfather was a belted earl: you said so yourself. That's awfully grand, isn't it."

"Whatever grandfather's grandfather may have been, grandfather himself was a weak-minded, drunken rotter—and what do we get out of *him*? He married his landlady because he couldn't support himself, and that's all there is to thank him for. I'm sure granny was worth a hundred of him: the funny thing is that she should have been such a blithering ass as to marry him. She knew what *she* was, and as far as I can make out she never pretended to be anything different. But I suppose she must have had a bit of snobbishness somewhere, to have thought it worth while taking up with a creature like that. Or else it was pity. But judging from mother, I should say it was snobbishness—though, to do mother justice, she's got a sort of finicky side to her, enough to make her unhappy sometimes, which may have come from her paternal ancestors. Anyway, I expect granny had sense enough to rue her little weakness. And I wish she was alive—I'd go and live with her and help her run her 'pub.'"

Juliet's mind was becoming chaotic: there was more in all this to examine and sort out and store up than she could comfortably manage; and, on the top of everything else, a necessity of answering. . . .

"Then when people sneer," she said at last, "is it because of granny's 'pub,' or because of the belted earl?"

"It's because we advertise one and try to suppress the other and any one can see from the way we go on—mother and Angela specially—that we'd be just nobodies if father didn't happen to have made his pile."

"But a nobody would be an awful thing to be!" gasped Juliet, to whom this term had become familiar, on the lips of her family, in regard to other people.

"I don't agree with you at all," said Olive. "It'd be much more comfortable than being shams. Now father isn't a sham, exactly—just an honest money-grubber, or possibly a dishonest one: I'm sure I don't know which. He doesn't pretend to be anything himself: all he wants is to show what money can do; and mother's little drop of blue blood that you can only see under a microscope, and heavily diluted at that, is just an asset to him, like the table silver. So will Angela's swell husband be, if she ever manages to hook one. And for all his vile tempers, he enjoys life more than mother does. He gets what he wants every time (at least, he has so far); only unfortunately he always wants the wrong things. But mother wants what she never can get, possibly; and she wants *us* to want it. But I don't, and I won't. There's only one thing I do want—and that's realness. And I'm jolly well going to get it, too, whatever anybody says."

A peculiar gleam crept into her eyes, and for the moment she looked less miserable. But Juliet, unaware that a still more thrilling topic was ready to come to the surface, pursued her own train of thought. Very diffidently, and with inward trembling, she asked a question:

"Does—does Miss Tiverton know we're shams?"

"You bet!" answered Olive.

Juliet's heart sank.

“Would that be why she doesn’t call?”

“I suppose so—among a lot of other very good reasons. I really don’t blame the old woman, though I’d like to box her cocky old ears.”

This irreverence was a negligible addition to the distress which Olive’s former statements had caused her. She was silent for a few minutes, deeply considering.

“Olive,” she said then, “I want realness. How do you get it?”

Olive, who also had been rapt in meditation, raised her head quickly. A smile, more subtle than most of her expressions, glimmered about the corners of her mouth, and her gloomy eyes kindled with a fierce satisfaction.

“Very soon,” she answered, “I’ll be able to show you. Stick by me, kiddy. They’ll raise hell—but I don’t care!”

Then she glanced at her watch and jumped up, saying she must be off at once—it was nearly four o’clock. She was “doing” a theater after her present engagement, and wouldn’t be back till any hour; but “they” would look after Juliet all right, wouldn’t they?

Juliet had been given permission to get up in the afternoon, and although it seemed scarcely worth the effort, with no one to talk to when she went down-stairs, she felt that the servants would expect it. Therefore she dressed, laboriously, and sought her tea in the schoolroom. When she had finished it she wandered down into the garden.

It was the first time she had been out-of-doors since her illness, and even in such a few days the season had somehow changed. Everything seemed quieter, emptier than usual, on this August afternoon—not only their own garden, in which the effect could be partly accounted for by the absence of her family, but all that lay outside and around the garden. There was no sound nor sense of other people’s activities. Even the birds were silent; and whenever a breeze rustled in the ash tree it brought fluttering down one or two crisp curled leaves, as though the ash tree

had been too sleepy to hold them. The air smelled damp and earthy, and there was a dahlia in bloom.

She noticed that in the house next to Ashtree Towers, on the south side, the blinds were drawn: that meant that the people had gone away. She turned and gazed in the direction of Miss Tiverton's, wondering whether she would have gone away, like every one else.

She betook herself to the summer-house, where she might watch for the cat; and, after a time, she knew with absolute certainty that Miss Tiverton had not gone away. No sound came from over the wall—not even the clink of a pail or the clucking of poultry in the witch-woman's yard: nor did the cat appear. You could have imagined the whole place deserted. But she knew, as twilight came on and the silence deepened around her, that Miss Tiverton was there. She gradually perceived the meaning of August. In time immemorial there would be a sort of perpetual August. . . . August was the month in which the world of people withdrew, with all its clamor and busyness. The quietness, the emptiness, were what Miss Tiverton needed to be old in. . . . When it was August she would walk in her garden. And that was why the cat didn't come: it would be walking with Miss Tiverton.

At the first shade of evening, it would have strolled out from the basement passage, that smelled of Irish stew, or from the witch-woman's kitchen, or wherever it was when it didn't sit on the wall. It would have sniffed the air, and listened, and turned about, and sniffed and listened again: it would have realized that August had come. And then it would have gone round, treading delicately, with its back high, to the west front of the house. It would have passed along the paved terrace (there must certainly be a terrace) till it came to a French window, of which half stood open. Over this window there would be thick clusters of jasmine and purple clematis, and on either side of it there would be tall rose trees in tubs, their branches spreading out at the top, all laden with creamy roses that had a sunset flush—Gloires de Dijon, she thought they

were called. The window would have curtains of a wonderful color as much blue as crimson—like fuchsias; and in the middle of the open half there would be a little brown table with curly legs, holding nothing but a china bowl filled with begonias. Beyond that you could see only bluey shadow, very dark, like the sky at night. The glass on the shut side of the window would be all on fire with the sunset—at least, the upper part would be; but if you peered through the lower part you would see the end of a sofa just coming beyond the fuchsia curtain. Leaning up against it would be an ebony stick with a gold knob. . . .

The cat would go gingerly as far as the opening, put its forepaws into the room, turn its head toward the sofa. And after a moment the fuchsia curtain would move: a hand would be drawing it back—a white, thin, twisted hand, laden with jeweled rings that sparkled and flashed as the sunset caught them. . . .

Almost, almost she could hear the footfalls over there—the soft padding of the cat, and a slow majestic pacing, and the tap-tap of an ebony stick. . . .

And when the next little wind came the ash tree leaned over toward Miss Tiverton's. . . .

Suppose other things should walk too? Suppose the ash tree could go into Miss Tiverton's garden, where it was always wanting to be? Suppose it was just her, Juliet's, being there that stopped things? Suppose, but for her, everything would dissolve back into time immemorial—all the new houses and gardens vanish, and nothing be left but Miss Tiverton's, and the bit of waste ground, and the green slope, and the thorn copse, and the sunset over the little hill. . . .

She drew herself together on the bench, made herself as small as she could, sat very, very still. . . .

Surely there *was* a padding of four feet, and a difficult, dignified pacing of two, and the tap-tap of an ebony stick? Surely at last they would come near enough for her to be certain—perhaps right under the wall where the cat got

over, just by the angle of the witch-woman's cottage. There might be gravel in the witch-woman's yard, and if so, in this tremendous stillness, she would be able to be sure. . . .

But though she still seemed to hear them, as it were a faint uncertain ripple on the deeps of silence, the sounds never became more definite. And the conviction grew upon her that time immemorial wouldn't overflow to-night, although it was August. And she knew why. It was because of her being there, and being a sham. Miss Tiverton had always known, but perhaps the cat hadn't; and now it did. Miss Tiverton would have told it as they walked.

She was crying as she groped her way out of the summer-house and down the path to the place where the friendly gate had sometimes been. . . . She passed her hands over the brick work, pressing on it, fingering it; and once, in her despair, she called: "Cat!"

But she could scarcely believe her ears when she heard a scramble and a soft bump overhead. There was the cat, looking down at her with solemn eyes. It didn't stretch itself, or curl round, or make any noise: it just sat and looked at her gravely. She perfectly understood its meaning. If it had spoken aloud it couldn't have said more plainly: "You must get realness. Miss Tiverton insists on realness. She has lived here from time immemorial, and she can't bear shams."

When it had gone Juliet returned to the house. She was not unhappy any more; for Olive had said you *could* get realness, and had promised to show her how it was done.

CHAPTER VI

NEXT day the doctor said there was no particular reason why Juliet should not very soon now join her people at Cromer. Olive, to whom he said it, looked extraordinarily glum, and mumbled something not quite audible. Juliet herself was secretly dismayed. Cromer meant being with her father and Leslie. She couldn't get over the horror connected with her father's single visit to her room before the family departure; and as for Leslie—she couldn't even imagine her future relations with him. He had held no communication with her since the affair of the poisoned milk; but she was sure that he must have guessed things. . . . What about his new fishing-rod, she wondered? If he had not got it, that would be counted as her fault; and no doubt he was echoing her own fervent wish that they might never see each other again. Unfortunately, he would have to come home some time; but September seems very far off in August, when time holds its breath; and she had hoped for a long respite.

There was another reason of hardly less magnitude for wishing to stay at home. Since her talk yesterday with Olive she had felt as if she were on the brink of adventure. Olive had something to show her; something that would make a big difference; something that would give her a sort of command over time immemorial. And getting to know Olive was in itself an adventure, vastly more worthwhile than any she could hope to meet with on the cliffs and sands of Cromer.

The doctor said his say and departed. As soon as he had gone, Olive turned to her with an air of exasperation.

"D'you *want* to go to Cromer, kiddy?"

"No, Olive—*of course* I don't."

Immense relief showed in Olive's countenance.

"Oh, good! I was afraid you might."

"It's ever so much nicer being here with you."

“Yes, isn’t it?” said Olive eagerly. “We’re very cozy together, aren’t we? But I’m afraid you’ll have to say you don’t feel up to traveling. You don’t, do you?”

Juliet had not considered the matter from this point of view.

“If you don’t think I feel up to it I ’spect I don’t,” she replied complacently, after a moment.

“Right-o! Leave it to me. The doctor said he’d come and have a look at you the day before you start, but we can ring up and say——” She broke off abruptly. “That’s settled, then. Well, kiddy, I’m off, and shan’t be back till to-night. You’ll be all right, won’t you, with your books and things?”

Juliet had no doubt that she would be all right; but as for books—she possessed none except *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, *The Treasury of Natural History*, and a Bible. No one had ever proved that there was anything inside the beautiful bindings which her father kept behind glass in the “library,” and, anyhow, the cases were locked. But books didn’t matter: there was always plenty to think about. Only she did feel a little sorry, when she saw Olive drive off in the two-seater, that the great revelation was not to be made to-day.

On the morrow, however, things looked brighter. Olive said she was not going out; though, from the difficulty she seemed to have in keeping still for two seconds, it became a question with Juliet whether she would really confine herself to the house and garden all day.

Cheered by the prospect of company, Juliet had dressed herself soon after breakfast; and Olive looked pleased when she came down-stairs. Preoccupied, however, with a hundred little tasks usually left to the servants, such as putting out flowers, tidying the drawing-room, and arranging chocolates in dessert dishes, she paid very little attention to her young sister till the morning was well advanced. Then, surprisingly, she joined Juliet in the summer-house.

The summer-house was too small to hold her comfortably, and her feet protruded into the path as she endeavored to lean back on the narrow bench against the wall. But she did not seem to notice any discomfort. For a while she sat thus, staring in front of her, while Juliet waited with the placidity of habitual idleness.

"Kiddy," Olive said at last, her voice not so rasping as usual, "would you like to know a secret?"

"Awfully, I would, Olive—if it's the one you said you'd tell me."

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"Yes—about getting realness. You said you were going to get it, and you'd show me how."

Olive laughed, deeply and pleasantly.

"Oh, yes. Well, you know, there's only one realness. That's love."

At first Juliet was too downcast to speak.

"Then I can't," she said after a few minutes, in a very small voice. "I'm too young."

Olive looked at her irritably.

"You do talk such a lot about yourself," she said. "Didn't I say I'd tell you something?"

Juliet, aware that they had somehow got at cross-purposes, immediately relinquished her own stake in the conversation. Much better let Olive talk, and see what came of it.

"Yes, *do* tell me," she entreated, hugging her knees.

"I might—if you asked questions."

This was rather baffling.

"Have you——" Juliet hesitated. "Have you got a young man?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"What's his name?"

"Archie."

"That's an awfully nice name. Is he Archie something?"

"D'you remember Rosie and Meta Small?"

"Oh, yes. I remember Meta. We were friends, and

Rosie was her sister—she'd got her hair up. But mother——”

“Quite so: ‘But mother——’” snapped Olive with unexplained viciousness. “Well, you know, Rosie and I belonged to the West Kensington Choral Society—so did Archie. He's got the most glorious voice. He was only just beginning to train for his profession when we lived in Ealing, and of course he couldn't have married then. But we've seen each other sometimes. I kept up with Rosie, though I didn't tell mother and Angela where I went on Saturday afternoons. And now——”

A blank, which Juliet knew she must fill in—if possible, gracefully. But the gift of verbal expression, if she had it, was still latent: Miss Anderson had done nothing to call it forth. Neither the Bible, nor the *Natural History*, nor Grimm supplied the exact phrase needed. It was too soon to say: “And now you'll live happy ever after.” But, after all, Miss Anderson did not fail her: the right words flashed into her mind.

“And now you're sweet on each other?”

“Seems like it,” said Olive, with a curious kind of curtailed grin.

“I'm so frightfully pleased, Olive. When shall you get married?”

“Pretty soon, I guess. Archie's rising very quickly in his profession.”

“What's his profession?”

Olive hesitated an instant; then said, rather truculently: “Dentist.”

Juliet looked grave. She was startled when Olive jerked round and faced her with the angry question:

“Why shouldn't he be?”

“Oh, but *of course* it's all right,” Juliet protested. “I was only thinking, when Leslie said he'd like to be a dentist and pull out people's teeth, mother and Angela said a dentist was a thing no gentleman could be. So I wondered if they'd think it as bad as hat-polish, like the Smalls' father . . .”

Olive's face had grown very dark; but suddenly it cleared, and she laughed—her loudest, most unmusical laugh.

"They won't think it a bit better," she declared. "And father won't think he's got his money's worth in the way of a son-in-law. As if I cared a damn!"

"Of course you wouldn't," said Juliet hurriedly.

"You see, don't you, kiddy? When you *love* any one—but I suppose you're too young to understand."

"Make me understand, Olive. I believe I could."

"It's like—like——" Olive flung out her arms and knocked Juliet on the mouth—an accident suffered without protest by the victim—"like breaking out into a new world, where you can *breathe!* You get right away from everything you've ever known, and things look all different—big and light and empty of everything but you and him. . . . The whole earth belongs to you, and you can go anywhere and do anything . . ."

It sounded very like time immemorial. Juliet was enthralled.

"Only," she said, after deliberation, "there'd have to be somebody to pull teeth out from." (In time immemorial there was only Miss Tiverton, and you couldn't imagine that—no, you couldn't. Witches and ogres, of course, would never stand it.) But why was Olive so agitated? Her face looked clouded and purplish.

"You little clod!" she muttered. "You haven't one spark of imagination."

Juliet's eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry if I said anything wrong, Olive. I was only wondering . . ."

Olive recovered her temper.

"Sometimes," she said benevolently, "I think you're not quite all there. I was a silly ass to try to make you understand."

"But I understand bits, Olive. I understand about your not caring a damn what mother and Angela say. Of course, it doesn't matter the tiniest bit—not when it's Archie. Olive, has every one been sweet on some one?"

“You bet—some time or other. But not like me and Archie.”

“Would even a very old person, the oldest person you can think of, have had some one like that—even if they were still called ‘Miss’?”

“I suppose so, when they were young.”

“Would it—would it be real if it wasn’t a dentist or hat-polish?”

“Don’t follow you,” said Olive, frowning.

“I mean, if it was a most wonderful Prince, like in Grimm, with velvet and feathers and a white horse, could any one be sweet on him without its just being because he was a swell? Or would it only be real if it was a dentist or something?”

“Oh, you *could* be in love with anybody,” said Olive, with a shrug: and a cloud of anxiety lifted from Juliet’s brow.

“But there aren’t such people,” her sister went on. “And if there were, they’d be duds compared to Archie. Personally, I can’t stand your do-nothing fops. Give me a man doing an honest man’s work—specially when it’s the finest kind of work there is—relieving pain.”

Juliet accepted this in respectful if surprised silence: she had been mistaken, no doubt, in her former view of a dentist’s vocation. And it was very exciting to think that when once she had seen Archie Small (which must be pretty soon now) she would be able evermore to visualize the kind of man with whom Miss Tiverton would have shared realness.

An unforgettable glamour fell upon the day when Olive told her a few minutes later that Archie and his sister Rosie were coming to Ashtree Towers that very evening. Never in her life had Juliet been so conscious of standing on the threshold of great events. Her first anxiety was lest Olive should expect her to have schoolroom supper and go to bed at her usual time: it seemed more than probable, in view of her convalescent state. But even as

she was summoning up courage to beg for a breach of rule, Olive informed her that she must put on her pink silk frock.

"You won't be too tired, or feel sick, or anything, will you?" she added, in a voice that prophesied displeasure if Juliet should say she would.

"Oh, *no!*" Juliet cried. "I shall feel as well as anything. What are you going to wear, Olive?"

"My orange—with my gipsy ear-rings."

After lunch Olive went to a hairdresser's to be "washed and waved," and immediately after tea she repaired to her room to dress. Caroline was in attendance, and their joint operations took perhaps an hour, at the end of which Juliet was summoned and Caroline dismissed.

Olive, when her sister entered, was turning slowly about before the mirror. One wall of her bedroom caught, through the north window, a level ray from the sunset, and threw into the room a luster in which the orange dress flamed. The heavy gold ear-rings, too, had a lively glint, and the dark brown, crinkled hair displayed a sheen not wholly due to hairdresser's *pomade*. Olive's arms and her neck (to use the term in a widely inclusive sense) were almost uncannily white. Juliet was impressed, and had no difficulty in answering the sharp, "Do I look nice?" with an emphatic, "Oh, perfectly gorgeous!"

But then, when Olive moved out of range of that reflected sun-shaft, it seemed to Juliet as if her own vision were suddenly blighted. *Did* Olive look nice? She couldn't see it, somehow, any more. . . . The big muscular form looked even a little ridiculous in those flimsy and sparse orange draperies: the monstrous ear-rings drew attention to the thick lobes of her ears: the artificial-looking coiffure, rippled all over with tiny smooth waves, seemed as if it were meant to crown a different sort of face—a small face, perhaps, with delicate curves and dimples, and a turned-up nose. Juliet felt a queer little heartache: she wished that her sister did look nice, as she had said at first. It was worse, too, when

Olive, having seated herself at the dressing-table, dabbed a powder-puff all over her sallow cheeks; much worse—positively ghastly. An impulse of loyalty drew protest from her, though in disingenuous terms:

“Olive—that spoils it. Your own complexion is heaps nicer.”

Olive looked round at her angrily.

“Idiot! I haven’t finished. Of course, it’s no good till I’ve done my lips.”

She proceeded hastily to “do” them. Juliet watched in growing dismay. Lips, no doubt, were intended to be red, but surely not so red as that? Even her mother’s and Angela’s were never quite so startling. And Olive’s mouth was big enough, without its size being doubled. Juliet surveyed her in morbid fascination: there was no getting away from it—her sister’s face looked like a fifth-of-November mask.

“I never can be bothered,” remarked Olive, anxiously manipulating the lip-stick, “to make up all day long like mother and Angela do. But, of course, as Angela says, every woman *can* improve on nature, and I suppose I owe it to Archie to make the best of myself. Now, kiddy, you’d better run along and get tidy.”

Juliet was not sorry to go: the sight of Olive had begun to make her creepy. Arrived in her own room, she set about her evening toilet listlessly, feeling already tired after the emotional excitements of the day. Once or twice, in the midst of her dress-changing, she looked wistfully out of the window. It was evident that to-night she had missed the sun—except for seeing him mock Olive round the angle of Miss Tiverton’s house. The western sky was thick and murky: she could not find the star; and the cat was silent—not unnaturally, perhaps, if it in any way shared her tremulous agitation about the coming of Archie, with all that he stood for . . .

A sound broke the rather oppressive stillness—a rich beautiful sound that made you hold your breath. The notes of a piano: herald-notes . . .

Juliet laid down her hair-brush, and drew nearer to the open window. Olive, in the drawing-room, was beginning to sing. Her voice, though distant, came clearly enough through the unmoving air—a magic voice, that swept away all the confusions and disturbances Juliet had brought with her from the scene of her sister's self-adornment.

“Oh! that we two were maying . . .”

Juliet knew the song; but had Olive ever sung it like this before? Had she ever before looked, as she was obviously looking now, straight upon time immemorial, and been hurt, as she was obviously hurt now, because she couldn't get quite in? Juliet's mouth quivered, and tears came to her eyes: she knew the feeling—she could sympathize with Olive. Let Archie come soon—soon. It was awful, even though it was also grand, that Olive should suffer so in waiting for realness . . .

As the voice died away at the pause between verses, another sound, over and above the notes of the piano, smote Juliet's ear—a sound that thrilled her before she could tell why. It was the opening of a sash window; and it came from Miss Tiverton's. Turning her head swiftly, she saw which window had been opened—one of that upper pair, from which Miss Tiverton would have watched the building of Ashtree Towers; and, just moving away from it, was the housekeeper. But before she vanished the housekeeper paused and bent to one side, as though speaking to some one who might be sitting, or lying on a couch, just inside the window but not quite in front of it. . . . And as the voice below took up its intolerably sad and magnificent theme, Juliet realized that, although she had never actually noticed it before, that particular squeaky gride of a sash window had often and often broken, for an instant, into Olive's singing. There was, indubitably, an association of long standing between the two sounds . . .

And now, kneeling with her arms along the window-ledge, her mass of tangled hair shaken back from her white absorbed face, she prepared for surrender to something that was coming like a wave, gigantic and yet gentle, to break upon her and Olive—to envelop them, to carry them away, in response to that passionate appeal that they might find themselves “at home”—at home in time immemorial, or (as the voice put it) “at home with God—with God.” She could understand God, she could worship God, she could love God, if He meant just that—time immemorial, realness, something that swept together herself and Olive and Miss Tiverton and the cat. . . .

Yet another sound: the sharp peal of the front door-bell. It silenced everything else. Juliet scrambled to her feet. Archie! and she had not yet got into her pink silk frock.

When she stole timidly into the drawing-room Archie was standing with his back to the empty hearth looking down at Olive, who had arranged herself in a majestic attitude among the cushions at one end of the sofa. At the other end sat a huddled, round-shouldered figure in turquoise blue, with an exaggerated fuzz of yellow hair. When Juliet opened the door this figure was emitting a curious sound between a choke and a giggle.

Her first impression of Archie had to be formed under the embarrassment of a straight gaze turned upon her as soon as she appeared. She saw at once that he was very beautiful. He had a wavy red mouth, a clear pink-and-white complexion, and fascinating little brown curls brushed back from his forehead and temples. He was not so tall as Olive; but his shape was faultless. Juliet had never liked men’s evening dress till now when she saw it on Archie’s slender upright form. And she had never seen evening dress so attractive. There were stripes down Archie’s trousers; and he wore hanging from under his waistcoat a black ribbon with something gold attached to it; and his coat had a velvet collar. His hands, which

he slowly produced from behind his back, were white and delicate like a woman's; and one of them was adorned with an imposing diamond ring.

She took it all in as best she could during her nervous approach toward the sofa.

"This is my baby sister," she heard Olive say. The figure in blue thrust out a plump hand, and giggled, and said Juliet wouldn't remember her. But she *did*, at first glance, remember Rosie Small; and Rosie seemed always to have been dressed in turquoise blue, and giggling in a heap on sofas. . . . Juliet returned the greeting perfunctorily, her shyness increasing to a painful degree with the consciousness of being amusedly surveyed by Archie, and of being about to touch his be-diamonded hand.

The great moment came: she traversed two feet of hearth-rug and everything swam around her as Archie, bending, gave her a smacking kiss.

"Not the rose," he said in the loudest possible whisper, "but near it."

Olive made a sound that might have expressed vexation or amusement: Rosie's giggles broke out with renewed impetus. Juliet stepped back dizzily, her bewildered glance darting hither and thither. Rosie patted the middle of the sofa, and she weakly obeyed the suggestion of sitting down.

"Such a big gurl you're getting," Rosie remarked. "You won't have long to wait before you're some one's rose yourself—will she, Olive?"

"Nothing like getting your hand in in good time," observed Archie, with his beautiful head on one side.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Olive. "You've no business to be putting ideas into the kiddy's head at her age."

Archie bent swiftly toward her, and answered in a lowered but still very audible tone:

"Do not tell me" (he laid his hand on his heart) "that it is too soon for your sister to become accustomed to the fraternal salute?"

Rosie spluttered again.

"You're being a frightful ass to-night, Archibald!"

said Olive tolerantly. "Ring the bell. Dinner ought to be ready."

At dinner there was a great deal of chatter and a great deal of giggling. Juliet couldn't enter into much of it, and least of all could she understand the things that were said to her; but this did not appear to matter, as some one else usually answered them. She noticed that Caroline and Agnes handed the dishes with an air of disapproval, and that occasionally they exchanged glances as they stood together by the sideboard. This also puzzled her. . . .

As soon as they returned to the drawing-room Rosie detached herself, made for the piano, and began thumping out a wedding march. Archie gave his arm pompously to Olive, and piloted her round and round the room, kicking out his feet in goose-step fashion, until she forcibly broke away from him. Rummaging in the pile of music, she commanded him to come over to the piano and sing. Archie protested that it was too soon after dinner—and such a dinner!—but when he had cleared his throat loudly and dramatically for some minutes, he took his stand by Rosie, who began the accompaniment to "Every morn I bring you violets."

Juliet seated herself by Olive on the sofa. It was a relief to her that Archie had consented to sing. It would give her time to adjust her impressions of him.

Olive had said that his was a glorious voice, and she found no reason to dissent: it reminded her of a fascinating pierrot whom she had once heard sing that very song on the beach at Cromer; and the tender eloquent glances he kept throwing at Olive were not unlike those with which the pierrot had wooed his audience. Juliet had been thrilled by the pierrot, and, of course, she was thrilled by Archie. But most of the time she gazed out of the window into the faintly luminous night. . . . She tried to hear the throwing up of a sash. But she did not hear it; and there was a curious flatness outside. She didn't feel in

the least as if anything were going to happen: time immemorial had receded far away. If only Olive would sing again, and bring magic into the air . . .

They begged her to sing, when Archie's performance was over, and she went with some alacrity to the piano. Rosie took her vacated place on the sofa.

"Do try that sweetly pretty thing you've got lying out there," Rosie called. "'Oh! that we two were playing . . .'" Very fetching it is, I always think."

But Archie groaned.

"*Don't* sing it!" he implored. "It gives me tickles down the spine, like a Sankey and Moody hymn. Try this, old girl." He thrust a sheet of music in front of her, and Olive sang *The Honeysuckle and the Bee*.

Afterward they sent Juliet to bed, and carried the gramophone out into the garden. Evidently Rosie had been placed in charge of it, for while Juliet was undressing she heard two pairs of feet on the path beneath her window: Olive and Archie must be going to the summer-house.

The gramophone wheezed out its hollow melodies, and revived in Juliet the creepy feeling that had first been aroused by Olive's powder-masked face. She stood looking between the chimneys of the gardener's cottage at those two straight closed windows on which moonlight glinted coldly. It was strange how empty, how shut-down, how *dead* everything seemed to-night. There were no secrets in the air, no thrills of expectancy; no hidden watchings and listenings in the dark: only the ludicrous cackling gramophone; the exclamations and gurgles and snatches of talk in the summer-house; shrill calls from Rosie on the terrace—first, to know what they wanted next, then to bid them stop spooning and come and wind the beastly thing up because she couldn't make it go. Then, a sort of scramble in the summer-house—Archie's light, jocose steps along the gravel, a brief colloquy with Rosie on the terrace, a fresh outbreak of the gramophone, the return of Archie to the summer-house, a renewal under her window of giggles and muffled fragmentary talk . . .

Yet this was the night of all others when it should have been easy to slip into time immemorial; for there was love in the garden—or realness, whichever you called it. And the iron gate should have been there in the wall, and the ogre should at last have opened it, and they should have followed the cat through it till they came right up to that long French window with the fuchsia curtains, and Miss Tiverton should have leaned forward on her couch and invited them in. . . .

Juliet gave it all up, and got into bed. But she was too tired to sleep, even if the gramophone would have let her. It must have been past midnight when Olive, looking rather hot and disheveled, came tiptoeing into her room.

“Hallo, kiddy! You ought to be asleep, but I thought perhaps you weren’t. Well—what do you think of my Archibald?”

“Oh, he’s beautiful!” said Juliet.

“Of course, you can’t really know him yet. He’s very fond of playing the giddy goat, especially when Rosie’s about. But if you could only know the *real* Archie!”

When Olive left her, Juliet felt that the disappointments of that night were to some extent explained: it was the unreal Archie who had come to dinner.

CHAPTER VII

JULIET knew no more of her sister's dealings with the doctor and the family than that both had been "squared," and that there was to be no further question of a move to Cromer. August, therefore, and the first weeks of September, stretched before her as a prolonged opportunity for idleness and dreaming—to be broken only by occasional snatches of Olive's society, and (she supposed) occasional visits from Archie. She found no cause for complaint in this. A slight relapse had followed the over-exciting and protracted day of Archie's first coming—"very conveniently," Olive said—and she certainly had no energy to be up and doing, nor any vision of anything that might have been pleasanter to do than nothing. She did not feel the least desire to share in Olive's theaters, motor-drives, river-picnics, and all the hundred and one amusements which proved not incompatible with Archie's rapid rising in his profession. Perhaps she would have liked to go sometimes with Olive by herself; but of Archie she had begun to feel curiously shy. She even dreaded the next meeting with him. It was extremely interesting to hear about him, and Olive would tell her the most wonderful little secrets—how, for instance, he had kissed her under a certain tree in Richmond Park, and what he had said while he was doing it. But Juliet knew instinctively that these proofs of devotion were more agreeable related in confidence than they would have been to witness or to overhear.

She did make one suggestion with a view to breaking the monotony of her own existence—namely, that she should renew her friendship with Meta. She had felt sure that her request to be allowed to ask Meta to tea would have willing consent from Olive, and was surprised that it should be met with frowning hesitation.

"Of course, there's no reason why you shouldn't," Olive said. "But mother would make no end of a shindy."

"Mother needn't know," said Juliet earnestly. "You never tell things you don't want to, so why should I?"

Olive laughed, a little uncomfortably.

"I'm nine years older than you. I've a right to manage my own affairs."

"But, Olive, when you're married to Archie, Rosie and Meta will be sort of sisters to us, won't they?"

"Certainly—*when* I'm married. Only, you see, there'll be a lot of dust kicked up before that happens. And you know, kiddy, I'm not sure that you'd care for Meta now."

"Oh, *wouldn't* I? Why ever not?"

"She's too old for her age, and rather dressed up, and talks about things you wouldn't understand. It's Rosie's doing, partly. You know, *quite* between ourselves, I do think Rosie's a bit vulgar sometimes, in spite of being Archie's sister."

"That's awfully funny, isn't it?" said Juliet. "Her being Archie's sister."

"You often find that sort of thing in families," Olive answered wisely. "One member much more thoroughbred than all the rest. Archie positively stands out, among the Smalls—any one could see that, with just a glance at his face. Sort of spiritual, isn't it? and yet frightfully manly. I don't suppose you ever saw any one so handsome, did you, kiddy?"

"Oh, no, *never*."

"And his voice! Isn't it perfectly angelic? It shows his temperament. No one who hadn't got temperament could sing like that, could they?"

"Oh, no, *of course* not."

"You know," said Olive, in a sudden confidential outburst following upon a silence, "I'm a most frightfully lucky girl . . . I don't mind telling you, if you'll keep it to yourself, that I never really expected this. I thought Angela'd be *first*, anyway, even if some day I followed suit. She's downright pretty, and men are always after *her*. But I always knew I was just one man's woman.

and somehow I didn't feel perfectly sure I should ever meet him. Men do go for looks so, and I know I'm no great shakes in that respect, though I can make myself very passable when I take the trouble, like I did the other night. Archie thinks I'm beautiful, but I know I'm not really, and he wouldn't have thought so if he hadn't loved me first. I can't think what made him begin. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I found he was really keen on me. I asked him once what made him, and he said, 'Because you are you.' That's another reason why I'm so frightfully lucky, Angela'll never be sure she wasn't married for her looks, and then, if she ever loses them. . . . But *I* know that Archie loves me for myself. He's always saying so. He said it yesterday, when we were rowing on the Serpentine. 'Sweetheart,' he said, 'I love you for yourself. You must always believe that I love you for yourself.' And then he kissed me. There were some people passing in another boat, and I felt rather awkward, but proud at the same time. It's not every girl—not even every *pretty* girl—who has such a gloriously handsome lover as Archie."

No more was said about Meta. The proposal had not meant very much to Juliet in the first instance; and Meta, in the light of Olive's brief description, lost all attraction. Besides, Juliet was not bored. She had plenty of use for the emptiness of her days.

A good deal of her time was spent in standing about by the front gates (which afforded a kind of chaperonage) and gazing up the road to see if any one went into or out of Miss Tiverton's. In this way she got to know where Miss Tiverton bought her provisions, and was surprised to find that they came almost exclusively from small local tradesmen, some of whom belonged to the poorer streets of the shopping district; whereas Ashtree Towers had almost everything from a big London store, whose van turned the corner noisily and impressively each morning at a fixed hour. Miss Tiverton's things came chiefly on

bicycles, and it was all rather slipshod. One morning a loaf of bread tumbled out of the little bicycle-cart right into the gutter, and Juliet was unspeakably shocked when the boy picked it up, rubbed his sleeve across it, and took it jauntily down the area steps as though nothing had happened. She worried about that for a whole day. It seemed all wrong that Miss Tiverton should have bread which had been in the gutter; and she was quite sure that she ought to go and tell the housekeeper. But she simply couldn't do it. For hours she fought with herself; imagined dragging herself along the road and down the area steps, ringing the bell that she had once broken ("in a manner of speech"), opening her case, answering a gruff, suspicious cross-examination. No, she couldn't. And for the time being she abandoned her vigils by the gate, in case she should see anything more of the same sort. It might be a joint next time, and a joint that had been in the gutter would certainly call for action.

As she grew stronger it became possible to appreciate a liberty never before enjoyed. Always there had been a tacit understanding that she was not to go out alone—at least, no farther than "up the road." Either Miss Anderson or a servant was supposed to accompany her on her walks; and if, as often happened, nobody had time or inclination to do so, she was to "play in the garden." The ease of Olive's yoke was proved by the fact that Juliet never even thought of asking permission for a solitary outing; moreover, when she wanted one, Olive was seldom there to ask.

Her lonely wanderings led her sometimes to the unmade road at the end of which stood a thorn copse. Already the copse was getting thinner, for men were at work clearing sites for houses in its immediate vicinity, and she was troubled, on her first visit to it after her illness, at finding that a thick hedge which had bounded it on the near side existed no more. Also, there were far more clouts and battered tins and newspapers lying about under the trees than she remembered seeing there hitherto; and gradually

she formed the habit of turning off down a road nearer than the one which led to this scene of spoliation.

The first turning after Ashtree Towers, on the same side of the road, held one point of extreme interest. The down-hill slope of it was flanked by two unbroken lines of very new houses, and these continued as far as the bottom of the little valley—that same valley which was overlooked by Ashtree Towers and Miss Tiverton's. When the upward slope began the houses on the left-hand side maintained their continuity, until they reached the main road lying along the far edge of the valley. But the houses on the right of this turning suffered a break at the bottom of the slope. It was caused by a high, age-mellowed, brick wall, and a pair of lofty wrought-iron gates. On this wall there was, and had always been in Juliet's memory, a board which stated that the property, called "The Grange," was to let. Even the board was rather dimmed by dust of ages, and her imagination would not compass the possibility of its ever being taken down.

Through the wrought-iron gates a great deal was to be seen. They opened straight on to a broad carriage drive, all overgrown with weeds. Just inside them, on the left, was a queer little stuccoed building that looked too small to be lived in; yet there were lace curtains in the tiny windows and potted geraniums. And she did sometimes see a man or a woman going up the drive toward the big house; or a bit of washing hung out on a line; or she heard a baby crying within the stuccoed walls. So the lodge must be inhabited by caretakers, and she was interested in it; but far more in such glimpses as she could get of the house itself and the grounds. Only an angle of the house could be seen, but the mere aspect of this suggested a condition of semi-ruin. The drive was bordered by huge oak and beech trees; and underneath them was a rank tangled undergrowth of rhododendrons, ferns, and even some wild things, such as campion and cow-parsley. In the spring and early summer she had seen crocuses, daffodils, primroses, bluebells. Now, in August, it all had a damp

refreshing smell of sweet bay and other shrubs. She enjoyed listening to the robins, or, if it were evening, to the hoot of the brown owls. Once, at dusk, she had seen an owl bunched up on the bough of an oak tree. And once she had seen a thing even more exciting—a gray, whisking thing with a bushy tail, going up one of the beeches. Long search in her *Natural History* revealed it as having been a squirrel of sorts; though the book gave no explanation of a squirrel—especially a gray one, which kind it said belonged to North America—coming into the near neighborhood of Ashtree Towers. Juliet concluded that it must be a relic from time immemorial, and the hope of seeing it again drew her still more often to this favored spot.

After many such gazings and ponderings she made a discovery which she felt to be of tremendous though as yet undefined import. She realized that if it were not for some very slight undulations in these private grounds and for the awkward position of some trees near the big house, she would have been able to see straight along the valley to the waste ground, sometimes alluded to as “the field,” at the bottom of their own garden. It had always been a mystery to Juliet how any one could ever get into the field except by climbing over garden walls; but now she saw that the approach to it must be through these very gates. The bottom of the valley, as far as Miss Tiverton’s, was simply an extension of these deserted grounds.

The more she thought about this the more it suggested to her. Miss Tiverton’s demesne seemed less lonely, less isolated: it belonged, really, to a sort of thread of time immemorial which cut clean through the newness represented by Ashtree Avenue and by the house, (not quite so new, but very far from old) on the opposite edge of the valley—a thread which, but for the intervention of Grange Gardens, would have continued as far as the thorn copse. Miss Tiverton’s ground actually touched this other, in which you could see squirrels and brown owls. . . . She wished fervently that she might go inside the gates,

and along the drive, and through whatever there might be of garden, until she came to the field, and, across the field, to the lowest part of Miss Tiverton's wall. That would have been a wonderful adventure.

Often, as she turned away, she would glance up meditatively at the board. "To Let": she supposed there was some rule by which you had to say that about a house when nobody lived in it. She was never perplexed as to why nobody lived in it: there could surely be nobody but Miss Tiverton old enough to live in a house like that; but sometimes she did wonder whether any one ever had lived there, and why, if so, it should have been deserted. She could only conclude that, although the last inhabitant must have been very old indeed, he or she had for some reason not got quite too old to die.

Lately she had seen little and heard almost nothing of the cat; and, in between other "thinkings," had exercised herself a good deal as to how she might fulfil the conditions of renewed comradeship. The cat, informed by Miss Tiverton during their first August walk that she was a sham, would naturally hold her at arm's length until such time as this should be altered; and nothing seemed to have changed in her as a result of witnessing Olive's experiment in realness. It would be unbearable to wait until she herself was old enough to have an Archie: besides, she couldn't feel quite sure that she would ever like having an Archie—even one who was always real. No, there must be some special thing for her to do, if only she could find out what it was; and at last she determined to thrash out the whole question with Olive. But how would she ever get the chance? They saw less and less of each other. Now and then, of course, Olive did spend an evening at home, but on these occasions Archie usually came to dine; and Juliet had chosen to revert to schoolroom supper—an arrangement with which Olive did not quarrel. For her present purpose it was necessary, first, that Olive should be at home by herself,

and, second, that being at home she should not wish to talk exclusively about Archie. For a fortnight after making her resolve Juliet patiently waited; but it seemed hopeless. In the last week of August, however, there came a sudden promise of opportunity. Archie was going for a week to Clacton-on-Sea.

It was not till he had been for three days away from London that Olive's mood permitted any approach on a subject not directly connected with Olive's concerns. But one afternoon, in the summer-house, after talking of Archie for nearly two hours, she relapsed into the silence of exhaustion. Juliet considerably gave her five minutes for recovery; then broke out with the great question.

"Olive, I understand all about you and Archie, and about your stopping being a sham; but I don't see just exactly what it is *I* ought to do so as not to be one. And you did say you'd show me, for myself as well."

Olive's thoughts had evidently been far away. She seemed to "come to" slowly, and perhaps a little crossly.

"Say that again," she answered in a bored voice.

Juliet said it again. By the time she had finished Olive was quite all there, and amused rather than cross.

"I don't think you *are* a sham, kiddy."

Juliet's eyes opened very wide at that. "But I must be, Olive. You said we all were, except p'raps father."

"Well, you see, you're not old enough to be anything much. What you'll turn into I'm sure I can't say. But I should rather fancy——"

"Oh, I can manage not to turn into one. But I thought I *was* one."

"Well, I say I don't think you are, at present."

Instinctively Juliet glanced at the top of the wall: the cat ought to be hearing Olive; but it wasn't there.

"Then, Olive"—she spoke tensely, after a few minutes of concentrated, anxious thought—"if I'm not one, I would like to do something to show I'm not. What *could* I do?"

Olive looked at her more amusedly, yet more affectionately, than ever before.

"You'll be doing something, kiddy, if you stick by me in the row."

"Of course I'm going to. What shall I say, exactly?"

"Well, at least you can speak up for Archie to mother and Angela, and father, if he'll listen to you—but he won't. And just tell them what you think of them for objecting. Of course, it won't make any difference, not the slightest, what *you* say; but still it's a nicer feeling for me that there's somebody in the house on my side, even if it's only an infant like you. And after all, you can say how perfectly splendid Archie is, and how you love him already as a brother. Mother's so sentimental that it might possibly make a tiny little bit of impression on *her*."

"Yes, I'll do that," Juliet promised cheerfully. It would be an awful fib, saying she already loved Archie; but Miss Anderson had once "stuck by" a sister who was "sweet on" somebody, and, judging from her experience, you must be prepared to say anything if you were to be of any real use. "And I'll tell them they're shams and never take anybody in. And I'll tell father he always wants the wrong things. And I'll tell them I'm going to do the same myself when I'm grown up. It may not be a dentist, but it'll be nobody a bit sweller. And I'll tell them——"

"Oh, well," interrupted Olive hurriedly, "you may not have to say all that. Anyhow, whatever you do say, you mustn't say I said it first."

"I won't," Juliet assured her. "I'll say I thought it all myself. I'll say——"

"Wait till the time comes," Olive enjoined firmly. "Then we'll see what you'd better say."

"When *will* it come? I want the big row, don't you?"

Olive made a grimace.

"I do, rather. That's to say, I want to get it over. Well, I suppose it'll happen in about a fortnight—as soon as they get home."

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the Saturday which brought Archie's return from Clacton-on-Sea things began to happen in breathless succession.

On the Sunday night Archie came to dinner, accompanied by Rosie and the young man to whom Rosie was suddenly engaged. Olive seemed curiously unexcited about this other love-affair.

"Rosie's always been engaged in the first week of September ever since I've known her," was the answer to Juliet's eager comments, given in a tone that dismissed the topic once for all.

Juliet saw Rose's "young man," but got no more definite impression of him than that he was extremely inferior to Archie. He could not, however, be a nonentity, since he (or the fact of his presence) created a noisiness on the premises beyond any that even the strong combination of Olive, Archie and Rosie seemed likely to produce unaided. The party sang solos and duets: they played Musical Chairs and Blind Man's Buff: they wound up the gramophone and danced wildly on the lawn. When they broke up, at considerably past midnight, they made the biggest noise of all.

Next morning Juliet was tired after her short night: so, apparently, was Olive. And Olive was cross into the bargain. Juliet gathered, from snappy information supplied to her during the morning, that there had been unpleasantness with the cook, due to what Olive called "damned hypocritical sabbatarianism"—a form of disease which, whether it were mental, moral or physical, Juliet felt must be very shocking. Also, it appeared, the cook had forgotten what she was paid to do—one of those things being to provide dinner for Archie as often as Olive chose to let Archie come; and he *was* coming again that very evening, whatever cook said.

As if all this were not bad enough, a telegram arrived from Cromer stating that Mr. Simpson would be back at night, having dined in the train. Despite this last mitigating clause, Olive, after reading the telegram, looked as if it would be necessary for the preservation of her sanity to do immediate violence to something or somebody; but after a moment's silent and convulsed meditation, she stalked to the telephone, rang up Liverpool Street Station, and inquired at what time the dinner train from Cromer would get in. The answer had a soothing effect upon her nerves, and she reverted to being merely cross, until a message came from Miss Tiverton. Then the storm burst, and her abuse of Miss Tiverton was embellished with language even more "mannish" than any Juliet had hitherto heard from her. Yet it seemed that this was not the sort of thing to make any one particularly angry. Miss Tiverton had merely let it be known, *via* her housekeeper and the Simpson's cook, that she would be obliged if the Misses Simpson would in future confine their gramophone within doors at a reasonable hour. What did hurt Juliet—only she would not dream of saying anything about such a private matter—was the implication that she herself had been partly responsible for the gramophone. But Olive raged. Nothing was too bad to say about Miss Tiverton, and after a few minutes Juliet crept away in distress and bewilderment. She was accustomed to think Olive right about everything, but never for a moment did she think her right about this. Too young for analytic thought on the great subject of human nature, she could only fall back on the very partial explanation that Olive had relapsed into being "like the family," and was feeling a grudge against Miss Tiverton, because, though she occasionally communicated with them, she never called. Or could it be that Olive, on certain occasions, had lamentably failed (as had Juliet herself) to get even on to the outskirts of time immemorial, and was somehow jealous of Miss Tiverton for being always in it?

Juliet took her problem into Grange Gardens. The

gates stood open, and two but dressed like her father up the drive toward about them as they were making little sweeps with Juliet watched them in a gruff voice saying:

"Good day, missy."

She turned her head lodge stood an old man posed, must be the grandfather of the baby stuccoed walls. Proceed not return his greeting.

"I knows you by sight an indulgent smile. "

I sees you lookin' in a hesitation.

"I wonders, ofttime squirrels, maybe?"

"Once I saw a square a brown owl. But the

"Well, there baint say, this many a year, changes comin', and none o' these days."

"Changes? What

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gates stood open, and two men (not caretakers or workmen, but dressed like her father in his city clothes) were strolling up the drive toward the deserted house. They looked about them as they went, pausing here and there, and making little sweeps with their hands while they talked. Juliet watched them in amazement, till she heard, close by, a gruff voice saying:

“Good day, missy.”

She turned her head swiftly. In the doorway of the lodge stood an old man leaning on a stick. This, she supposed, must be the caretaker, or the caretaker’s father—grandfather of the babies who sometimes cried within the stuccoed walls. Preoccupied in “placing” him, she did not return his greeting.

“I knows you by sight, little missy,” he went on, with an indulgent smile. “Many a day as I sits by the winder I sees you lookin’ in at these ’ere gates.”

“Yes—I do look in, very often,” said Juliet, with hesitation.

“I wonders, ofttimes, what you be lookin’ at. The squirrels, maybe?”

“Once I saw a squirrel,” she replied, “and once I saw a brown owl. But that’s not what I look at mostly.”

“Well, there bain’t overmuch *to* look at, as you might say, this many a year, along o’ this old place. But there’s changes comin’, and maybe it’ll be better worth your while one o’ these days.”

“Changes? What changes?” asked Juliet eagerly.

The old man shook his head, and glanced up the drive at those two loitering, black-coated figures.

“That’s not fur me to say, not so far, missy. But I reckon, now the embargy’s removed, they’ll drag this ’ere place out o’ rack an’ ruin; an’ I says to my daughter and ’er man, I says: ‘What’ll become of us, as ’as ’ad no other ’ome this many a year?’ I allus reckoned, I did, as the embargy’d last my time.”

“Who are you gossipin’ with now, father?” demanded a capable-looking woman, appearing behind him with a

baby on her arm. She surveyed Juliet indifferently, and before there was time to ask what an "embargy" might be, the old man had shuffled indoors.

At lunch, Olive was still smoldering; but Juliet, though more often than not she respected the family moods, was too impatient for information to preserve a discreet silence.

"Olive," she said, "what's an embargy?"

"Never heard of one," Olive snapped.

Juliet, after a pause, approached the subject from a different angle.

"That field below the garden," she remarked, "it's a bit of the Grange."

"I could have told you that."

Another interval. Juliet tried again.

"Why are there to be changes at the Grange, Olive?"

Olive's sulkiness was penetrated by an infinitesimal flicker of interest.

"Didn't know there were." Her tone held a questioning inflection, and Juliet was encouraged.

"Yes, there are. The place is to be dragged out of rack and ruin. There were men walking about the grounds."

"Is the board down?" Olive vouchsafed to inquire.

"I didn't notice. But an old man told me. He lives in the lodge. I think he's the caretaker's wife's father."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Only that there were to be changes, and something to look at, and it had been their home this many a year, and he reckoned that the embargy would last his time."

"'Embargo,' you mean. I suppose there was some reason why the place couldn't be sold, and now it can be. No one would take a tumble-down house like that on lease. I think I once heard the property was in the hands of the Lunacy Commissioners. By the way, this probably explains about father hurrying back—drat him."

"How does it explain? What do you mean?" Juliet questioned. "What are Lunacy Commissioners?"

"Oh, my dear child, do stop your eternal catechism."

Olive invited her to dine down-stairs that evening, and when Juliet assured her with unusual vigor that she liked schoolroom supper, pressed the point rather irritably.

"Well, you can give up being unsociable for once," she said. "I wish you to come down to dinner."

"But I should think you'd like being alone with Archie," Juliet argued.

"Of course I like being alone with Archie, and we don't really want your company in the least. You can go to bed as soon after dinner as you like. But when you have servants with such vulgar minds as ours——"

At dinner there was tension in the atmosphere. Both Olive and Archie gave the impression of being strung-up, and at first they were much less boisterous than usual. Archie, in fact, seemed definitely ill at ease, until he had drunk several glasses of champagne. Then he brightened up wonderfully.

When Caroline left the room for the last time he raised his glass and brandished it in the air.

"Let's drink," he cried, "to an End and a Beginning!"

He was suddenly so good-tempered that Juliet ventured to ask what had ended and what was to begin. His eyes, as he answered her, were alarmingly liquid—almost as if they would overflow their sockets.

"A d-d-dream month has ended," he said. "A month of secret and care-free bliss. A month carved out of time—a priceless gift bestowed by the gods upon your angelic sister and my humble, unworthy self. A month——"

"Out of which you wasted a whole week at Clacton-on-Sea," Olive broke in, but not with vexation. She, too, had cheered up: her eyes were extraordinarily bright, and there were indications of a flush in those parts of her face where the powder, unskilfully handled, had failed to settle.

"There's been a month without that," said Juliet, unconsciously saving her brother-in-law elect from the embarrassment of replying. "It's been five weeks altogether."

"And the beginning," Archie went on hurriedly. "What is it the beginning of, do you ask me?" He paused—no doubt to give emphasis to what should come. But Juliet was now in a position to answer her own question.

"I see what you mean," she said. "The beginning of the big row."

"That's not what Archie means," snapped Olive. "And, anyway, you needn't be so cock-a-hoop about it." Which was surprising, as Olive herself had professed to look forward to the row. But when she had had still more champagne, the momentary grievance against Juliet was forgotten, and soon she was telling Archie, very volubly, all about what the cook had said that morning, and about Miss Tiverton's message.

"That old woman is a positive pest!" she declared. "She seems to live for nothing else but to insult us."

"Is that so?" replied Archie, with preternatural gravity. "Is that really so? She insults you, does she? Give me the chance, and I'd deal with her—see if I wouldn't. She doesn't like the gramophone, doesn't she? Come along, let's carry it out into the garden."

Olive jumped up.

"Yes, let's. But you know, Archibald mavourneen, you've got to clear off the premises before ten o'clock."

"Oh, we can make a great deal of noise between this and ten o'clock!" Archie tossed off yet another glass of champagne. "A great deal of noise. You see if we can't."

Juliet plucked at her sister's sleeve as they were going out of the room.

"Olive—I want to tell you something."

Olive stopped impatiently.

"You alone, please, Olive. I'll whisper."

"Stuff and nonsense! We've got no secrets from Archie—or if *you* have, it can wait till he's gone. What on earth's the matter?"

Juliet thought swiftly. Well, if she must say it before Archie—

"Olive, Miss Tiverton likes your singing. When you sing the housekeeper opens the sash window for her to hear."

Olive stared.

"Oh, *does* she? Very good of her, I'm sure. Well, to-night she'll hear something she *won't* like—old beast!"

Juliet drew back coldly.

"Miss Tiverton doesn't mind the gramophone," she said, "except when it's not a reasonable hour."

"Then let's find something she does mind!" cried Archie excitably. "You shall be avenged, my Olive, before I leave this house! Any suggestions?" The question was addressed to Juliet.

Her glance at him conveyed, for the first time, the full measure of her disapprobation.

"I think," she answered, "you'd much better leave Miss Tiverton alone."

Archie exploded with laughter: so, after a moment, did Olive.

"I wish we could give her and her precious housekeeper a good shock, or fright, or something," she exclaimed recklessly. "Anything to shake them out of their beastly smug superiority!"

Archie looked at her quickly; then he shut his eyes, and pressed his fingers to his temples. After remaining so for a few seconds, he broke into a *pas seul*.

"I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!" he chanted as he skipped. "Get me a white sheet, and a thin scarf, and your pocket electric torch, and a burnt cork, and a banana skin, and a ladder. And tell me which room she sits in."

Olive, who seemed beside herself with excitement, dashed off to collect these properties, and fell up the stairs in her haste. Archie solemnly pirouetted in front of the hall mirror. Juliet stood stock still, and watched him.

She continued to watch, from the threshold, while he dressed up in the library, helped by Olive. The sheet which covered him was knotted over his head into a semblance of

donkey's ears. His face was disfigured by smears of burnt cork, and a bit of banana skin arranged to look like teeth. His arms and hands were muffled in a gauze scarf, through which gleamed the torch. Olive darkened the room, and ascertained that the grotesque face could be rendered visible at any moment by judicious manipulation of the light he held.

"That's All!" she declared. "Now, wait a sec. There's a hand-ladder in the tool-shed, and I'll put it for you against the wall, at the angle where ours joins it. That'll be easiest for you: our wall's a bit lower than hers. You can haul up the ladder after you, and swing it over to the other side."

"If he goes over the wall," said Juliet, very quietly and distinctly, "he will be in the ogre's and witch-woman's yard."

"What's the kiddy babbling about?" inquired Archie, carefully touching up his donkey's ears.

But Olive had gone to fetch the ladder. In a few minutes she came back, breathlessly, to say that everything was ready.

"But which way does her room look?" Archie demanded. "And suppose she's not at the window? Isn't there a penny whistle or a concertina or something I could have?"

"There's Leslie's mouth-organ. Juliet, do you know where it is?"

"No," said Juliet.

"Well, then go and hunt for it—quick."

"I couldn't find it."

Olive looked at her furiously, then went off herself, and returned in triumph with the object of her search. Archie put it to his lips, but the banana-skin teeth proved an obstacle, and had to be transformed into a tongue. Having assured himself that he could, at need, produce sufficiently hideous and penetrating sounds, he prepared to start. In the doorway he stopped.

"You've not told me yet which window?"

“But I don’t know. You must try them all.” Then his fellow-conspirator bethought her of Juliet. “*You* seem to know all about the ways of our esteemed neighbor, you sulky little wretch! Where *does* she sit in the evenings?”

“Nobody knows,” answered Juliet.

Though it was perfectly obvious that some unheard-of calamity, perhaps even the end of the world, would result from Olive’s sudden loss of reason combined with this terrible predominance of the unreal Archie, yet Juliet was under a spell of cold fascination that made it impossible for her not to be witness of their proceedings. They went out-of-doors through the back lobby: she crept after them, and turned aside to take up her station in the summer-house.

The moon had risen now, and she could see, down the long path, a white-sheeted figure shambling up the ladder. She was aware in every nerve of the somber house near by, which guarded, in almost terrible silence and aloneness, the mystery of a being too old to die; aware of the straight sardonic windows watching in the moonlight till Archie and his pitiable antics should come into their view; aware, too, of other watchers whose watch was the more deadly because they made no sound—watchers in human shape, yet having powers that were more than human; aware, above all, of the great moon eyes of the cat.

Archie hoisted himself on to the top of Miss Tiverton’s wall, drew up the ladder, let it down on the other side. And still the cat did not show: it would be sitting quietly in some hidden place, watching, waiting, in company with the witch-woman and the ogre.

The white figure disappeared, and Juliet shuddered. But Olive, on the safe side of the wall, doubled herself up in contortions of misplaced amusement.

For a while there was silence—silence like there would be before the trump of doom. Then the squeaky sound of a mouth-organ, far away. So—no doubt, with intention—they had let him pass; let him go blundering to the very threshold of that mystery which must annihilate him.

Archie, or such as Archie had made himself, could not survive in time immemorial. She closed her eyes; and, having closed them, could see with horrible distinctness a white figure pirouetting insanely and shaking donkey's ears on a quiet moon-drenched lawn.

If only *something* would happen to end this unbearable suspense!

She was in no state to grasp the import of what did, almost immediately, happen—a long, shrill, urgent, yet unflurried whistle. But she recognized it as the beginning of catastrophe; and panic seized her. She must get away, as far as her legs would carry her—to the Grange, no, farther, to the thorn copse; and farther than that, if she could.

She was preparing to bolt through the house, when something in the appearance of Olive held her back. Olive had straightened herself—grown rigid, tense: she looked frightened, Juliet thought. It was almost a maternal impulse that sent her flying down the garden. She clutched her sister's arm.

“Come quick!” she whispered. “There might be time. I know a place; only *do* be quick!”

“I *can't!*” Olive whispered back. “I must help Archie. They've whistled for a bobby. What on earth's he doing? He's got the ladder . . .”

She raised herself on tiptoe, as though she might hope thus to see over the wall. Then she called, in a low but carrying voice: “Archie, you idiot! Buck up!”

There was a kind of scrabbling on the other side of the wall; and there was another noise, that seemed to come from a little way down the road—a loud roar, subsiding to an impatient throb. At normal times Juliet would have recognized this as the sound of a motor-car; but now it meant only another phase in the gathering of those mysterious forces that were to destroy Archie—and Olive, and herself, if they did not escape.

“Dash it all, I can't! It's this infernal lilac bush . . .”

(So Archie was still alive.)

“D’you mean you’re caught up? If you’ll hoist over the ladder——”

“Haven’t an arm to do it with. It’s this damned sheet! Why the devil did you let me in for such a silly-ass game?”

Again the ominous roar—approaching their own gate now, and quieting down just outside it. The donkey’s ears, waving frantically, showed above the wall. The torch and the mouth-organ were thrown over into the garden. Archie kicked and struggled.

Olive and Juliet became aware of a light flooding out from behind them over the lawn. A burly figure stood framed in the long window of the drawing-room. Olive gasped.

“Why, his beastly train’s not in yet!”

“He came in the car,” whispered Juliet, suddenly understanding.

For a second or two Olive seemed petrified. Then she recovered her wits.

“Down into the *field*, Archie!” she hissed. “Not the garden, whatever you do.”

“I tell you I can’t get down *anywhere*,” retorted the victim of the lilac bush, with what sounded to Juliet like a sob. “And here comes their blooming copper.”

Here also came Mr. Simpson—slowly, inexorably. Olive, looking all crumpled up, went over the lawn to meet him.

“Earlier than we expected you, father,” she said in a sickly voice.

“Yes. I decided to bring the car. Got to run round a bit to-morrow. But what’s all this rumpus next door? I saw a policeman going in, and stopped to see if I could help.”

Presumably there were conditions on Archie’s side of the wall which prevented cool calculation. At all events, he landed with a bump right under Mr. Simpson’s nose, trailing behind him some yards of torn sheet. There was

no expression but of sheer vacancy in his cork-begrimed face.

The ladder had remained on Miss Tiverton's side—and that, no doubt, accounted for the appearance above their heads of a policeman's helmet.

The policeman's voice, addressing Mr. Simpson, broke a formidable silence.

"Seems to 'ave been a pre-arranged bit o' trespassin', sir, judgin' by the ladder."

Archie picked himself up, rubbed his bruises, and fastened his helpless, child-like gaze upon Olive. Juliet, standing apart, thought that she had never seen anybody look so ill as Olive looked, leaning there against the wall in the moonlight. Yet Mr. Simpson showed no pity: he was evidently sure that she knew all about it; and, having gripped some part of Archie's limp person, he bombarded her with questions couched in more and more abusive terms. Quite suddenly Olive shook off her stupor.

"Oh, keep your hair on, father!" she cried furiously. "It was only a lark. I should have thought you'd be the first to laugh at one's getting a rise out of the old hag next door. Have you been converted at a beach service, or what?"

"You mind your tongue, my girl! It's got enough to answer for without impudence thrown in. For the hundredth time, who *is* this damned fool!"

Keeping hold of Archie, he advanced toward her with something like threat in his gait. Olive shrank back.

"Archie Small."

"I'm no forrarder. Who's Archie Small? One of your low hangers-on?"

"M-my fiancé," Olive answered, throwing up her head.

"Oh, your fiancé? Thanks for telling me. I'm glad to know that. I'm——"

In a second of time Juliet fought one of the fiercest conflicts of her life. Her father looked ugly: he spoke in an ugly voice: he seemed about to commit himself to an ugly action; but in her bewildered eyes he had suddenly ac-

quired all the dignity and splendor of an avenging spirit from another world. Perhaps, as Olive said, he had been converted (whatever that might mean) at a beach service: anyhow, the triumphant fact remained that he had declared himself on Miss Tiverton's side; that he was holding Archie by the scruff of his neck; that, morally supported by an interested policeman looking over the wall, he was prepared to punish Archie in some frightful way. But there was a promise made to Olive—a promise to "stick by" when the big row came. She would never have made it if she had known what Archie had it in him to do. But she had made it.

She stepped out of the shadow, where she had lingered unperceived.

"Father," she stammered. "You don't understand. . . . It's not so bad as you think. . . . That's not the *real* Archie."

He had started at the first sound of her voice, and turned on her with unexpected violence.

"You in it, too, you miserable little whipper-snapper! Get away to bed."

When at last the hubbub of excited talk and slamming doors had ceased, and she lay in bed thinking things over, Juliet felt no resentment against her father for having said that. It would have been unreasonable to expect him to understand her position, and unreasonable expectations were not characteristic of Juliet. No, she felt only gratitude toward him.

What did "converted" mean? she wondered sleepily. Changing from wicked to good? Certainly there didn't seem much doubt that he had been wicked about the cat, before he went away. But at least he had never been a sham: Olive said so. Only he had always wanted the wrong things. Perhaps being converted meant suddenly wanting the right things. Perhaps now he wanted time immemorial.

That was an amazing possibility, and Juliet, nearly

asleep, roused herself a little to envisage it. But scarcely had she begun to do this when a brown owl woke somewhere among Miss Tiverton's trees, and screeched hideously across the quiet night: "Tut—tut! Boo—hoo!"

In a house like the Simpsons', where doors are thin and voices loud, and where servants gossip as they make the beds, you get to know things without actually eavesdropping. By noon next day Juliet knew that all the servants had given notice to Mr. Simpson: the doings of Sunday night followed by the doings of Monday night had proved too much for their equilibrium.

Juliet also knew that Olive was having an extremely bad time in the library; but all this became trivial when she saw her father set off to call on Miss Tiverton.

There could be no mistake about his intention, because, before he banged the front door, she heard him shout to Olive that he had a good mind to make her go and apologize to the poor old lady herself.

She decided to follow him at a safe distance up the road, and thus savor to the full the extraordinary event of his actually going to Miss Tiverton's—going not down the area steps in Ashtree Avenue, but through the severe gate that opened into the old road. She was creeping along under Miss Tiverton's wall, her eyes glued to the determined figure striding ahead, when the two-seater, driven by Olive, overtook her.

Olive slowed the car.

"You trying to get out of it too, kiddy? If so, fetch a hat and come along."

"Out of what?" asked Juliet.

"Out of reach of *that*, of course," said Olive, with a darkling glance at the figure now disappearing round the corner.

Juliet shook her head.

"No, I don't want to go with you," she said.

Olive looked at her keenly; then shrugged her shoulders.

"Prig!" she exclaimed, and speeded up the car.

Juliet looked after her dispassionately. She had a curious sense of detachment from Olive, as if their long weeks of intimacy had gone for nothing. She had done her duty by Olive last night, and now she felt that it wouldn't matter if they never saw each other again. Olive had talked so much about getting realness; but she never would get it, because of Archie. Slowly, but very surely, the conviction had come to Juliet that there was no real Archie. And so Olive's love couldn't be real love.

Yet, if she had become critical of Olive, she was sorry for her, too. She couldn't forget that the Olive of last night was the same Olive whose singing had once caused Miss Tiverton's window to be opened. It was all very puzzling; but not worth bothering about. Olive and her affairs were as vapor vanishing on a horizon filled by the stupendous fact of her father being on his way to Miss Tiverton's—on his way into the very heart of the blue shadow, where he would look upon the face of somebody too old to die. . . .

The wonder of this made a queer sensation about her heart: it seemed at once lead-heavy, yet so elastic that it kept swelling to a great size. Within a few inches of the area railing she came to a standstill; for she had a shyness about passing the window. She stood against the wall, head bent and eyes shut, trying to imagine what was happening—so near, yet a whole world away.

By now he must have reached the door in the old road, and pulled the great iron bell-handle. She wondered who would open it, since it was not really the front door of the house. Would the ogre come shambling round from the yard? Perhaps he would be digging or chopping wood close at hand. Anyhow, some one would have opened it by this time, and her father would be walking toward the house, up a path bordered by little box hedges about a foot high, smelling very strong and clean in the September sunshine. Close under the box hedges would be rows of asters, white and pink and purple. The path would be made of hot white flagstones, with here and there a sun-

dried worm lying across them, and here and there a sprinkling of busy ants. Pushing up between the flagstones would be dandelion leaves and tufts of grass.

Now he must be at the real front door. It was cool dark green, with a porch that had recesses and benches in either side. There would be clusters of Jackmania falling over its top, and flaming columns of nasturtiums at the entrance. Just outside the porch would be beds of nice, fresh-smelling, earwiggy dahlias. Would he have to ring again, or would some one be waiting to receive him?

She started violently: through the open basement window there sounded the peal of a bell. She recognized its import, with a shock almost of fear at this endorsement of her imaginings. She supposed he would now be waiting in the porch till the housekeeper should ascend in her flat-footed majesty from the lower regions.

The whole air seemed tense with approaching crisis; and she began to lose confidence in the issue. It was all very well for her father to go to the door; but what would happen next? What *was* happening, even now? The housekeeper, with a grim expression, would allow him to cross the threshold; and in front of him would stretch a long, shadowy, utterly silent passage, that had a close, even musty, atmosphere. There would be shut doors all along one side of it, and far away, at the end, a narrow window, through which came only a pale thread of the brilliant morning light. The cat, just visible in the dimness, would be walking away down the passage with its tail upright. It would have come to the door with the housekeeper, but now it would walk away, because it had never been friends with her father, and, in spite of last night, didn't feel really sure about his being converted. The housekeeper would close the door upon him sternly, as if he had come into a prison; and he would follow her square back down that way of gloom. The housekeeper's feet, being slippered, would make no sound; but her father's big boots would creak most horribly, and he would stumble against the walls of the passage. The

housekeeper would stop outside the farthest door on the right-hand side, and would give him a rather frightening look. Then she would noiselessly turn the handle, and stand waiting for him to go in. . . . There would be shimmering blue mist, with a fuchsia tinge; and through the mist he would see a great oblong of light framed in black, which was the French window. And there would be a smell of potpourri. And the mist would shimmer and shimmer so that he could see nothing clearly; and he would feel—oh, surely he would feel—that he was too big and clumsy and noisy to go on. Not like the cat, who could slither where it would without causing any destruction or disturbance.

She heard a footstep, looked up sharply, and saw her father coming back down the road. He walked heavily, and she could see that he was frowning. The frown, indeed, was almost a scowl; and in a moment she realized why he was back so soon. He hadn't been let in.

The instinct of self-preservation sent her scuttling home in front of him. Safely harbored in the summer-house, she reviewed her sensations, and discovered that she was not really disappointed. What would happen about the ladder? It had been forgotten in all the excitement about Archie. Would the ogre throw it over the wall? At dead of night, perhaps? while the brown owl looked on from his hidden branch, and called at the creaky top of its voice: "Tut-tut! Boo-hoo!"

All the same, she hoped her father would go on trying.

CHAPTER IX

BUT she had not expected a renewal of his activities on that very day.

After a tête-à-tête luncheon, during which her father, poring over papers and something that looked like a map, had seemed even less aware of her than usual, she set off for Grange Gardens, with the object of ascertaining whether anything had begun to look different inside the iron gates as a result of the embargo being removed. And she had been peering through the bars for not more than ten minutes when she became conscious of men's voices, and footsteps bearing down upon her. Turning, she discovered that she had been followed by her father and Mr. Townley.

Mr. Townley was her father's surveyor. Juliet liked him, without knowing why. Sometimes she thought it was because he was utterly different from her father, and this in unexpected ways. Of course, Mr. Townley was younger: she knew it for a fact; but in certain respects—notably in his grave quietness—he seemed older. His face, too, had rather old things about it. Her father's was smooth on the whole, and red, and chubby in places (the wrong places, Juliet was inclined to think); and his nose, though large, always reminded her of a baby's. His mouth, which could be seen quite plainly in spite of his mustache, had a pouting look, also like a baby's when the baby is going to scream. But Mr. Townley's face, if not exactly thin, was of an altogether more definite shape. Its color was pale brown. His mustache was clipped very close, but even so his mouth showed less than did her father's—or else there was less of it to show. What did show was straight and rather severe—not in the least like a baby's. Mr. Townley's face, moreover, was faintly lined, whereas her father's had gone here and there into heavy creases which left the other parts looking odd in

their smooth youngness. Mr. Townley could frown; but his frown did not suggest bad temper: it only made him appear to be thinking particularly hard. And then, it was very curious about their eyes. Her father's eyes—round, bottle-green, and slightly protuberant—were not so empty as Angela's, but they never expressed anything that wasn't to be read in his other features. Mr. Townley's gray eyes had a kind of life of their own: she could never be sure what he really meant until she looked into them; and that wasn't altogether easy, because they were set deep, and seemed to go deeper, amid a network of funny little puckers, the more she tried to see. But when she did get at them she realized that they were the eyes of a person who had collected things through years and years of being alive; while her father's, though he had been alive much longer, didn't seem to have collected at all. And then, again, she had the impression that Mr. Townley was not only older than her father, but physically stronger. That must be absurd, because his frame, though square and solid, was ever so much the smaller: why, his head scarcely came above her father's shoulder. Yet she felt that if it were a question of fighting there would always be a chance of the bigger man collapsing suddenly into pulp, whereas something in the way Mr. Townley was put together suggested that he could do an awful lot of damage if he chose. Only he would never want to do damage. That was the queer thing about Mr. Townley: he struck her as capable of doing and being so many things that he didn't choose to do and be. He was really more "businessy" than her father, in so far as she simply couldn't imagine him in a dressing-gown shouting down the passage that his shaving-water was cold, or in a velvet jacket at the head of a family dinner-table sending things back to the kitchen because they were underdone. Mr. Townley, always and for ever, was a person who attended to business in a neat gray suit. Even on the rare occasions when he came to dinner at Ashtree Towers he still wore the gray suit, as Juliet had observed over the banisters;

and she gathered that he did not add much to the gaiety of the party, because Angela invariably referred to him afterward as a "hopeless stick."

In this predicament of being found gazing in at the Grange gates by herself, which wasn't officially allowed, she felt that Mr. Townley's presence would very likely prove helpful. Her father didn't seem to notice her till he had almost run into her: then his preoccupied look intensified into the familiar frown.

"What are *you* doing here?" he demanded. And she knew that Mr. Townley was wondering the same thing, though his eyes had almost disappeared into their puckers.

"Nothing, father. Only looking. The embargo's removed."

If she hadn't happened to glance up as she said that, she wouldn't have seen Mr. Townley's smile—it came and passed so quickly.

"Thanks for the information, wherever you got it," said her father; and he pulled the bell which rang into the lodge.

Juliet watched him, open-mouthed.

"Are you going *in*?" she cried after a moment.

"Certainly I'm going *in*, if your ladyship has no objection."

"Oh, father, *please!* Can I come with you?"

"No, you can't. Why are you hanging round here like a street urchin, anyway? Run off home."

But Juliet stood her ground, feverishly thinking out some more potent form of appeal. Meanwhile, the woman with the baby had answered her father's ring. She was opening a small side gate. Without demur, her father was allowed to go through. Juliet plucked at Mr. Townley's sleeve.

"There's a squirrel in the trees," she said urgently. "P'raps I could show you?"

Mr. Townley actually stood aside for her to pass in in front of him. Then he spoke to her father, who was fumbling for something in his pocketbook.

"I'm sure we should like Miss Juliet to show us the squirrel, shouldn't we, Mr. Simpson?"

Her father grunted, but no one could have said whether the grunt had reference to Juliet or to the paper he was unfolding—one of those, Juliet thought, with which he had occupied himself at lunch. At all events, here she was, inside the Grange gates; and she walked gingerly beside Mr. Townley, keeping as close as possible under the shelter of his person.

The excitement of it was almost intolerable. For a little while, as they walked up the drive, she did not see much more than she had been able to see through the gates: but she knew that there would be great revelations when they reached the top of the slight incline and came alongside the house. There would be the house itself, of which hitherto she had seen no more than one gaunt angle; and then the ground would slope downward again into the valley that lay below the gardens of Ashtree Avenue; and there would be the Grange field spread out. And so, by this untried way, they would approach Miss Tiverton's . . . She wondered how her father and Mr. Townley were feeling. It surprised her that they should dare to talk incessantly, not even with bated breath—and in such a dull grown-up way. They kept stopping too, and glancing about them, like those other men whom she had watched. (Whenever this happened, she tactfully arranged for Mr. Townley to be between her and her father's glances.) But they were not looking out for the squirrel. They seemed to be looking at things that weren't there and their conversation was full of words she didn't know the meaning of—such as "frontages" and "subsoil" and "ground-rents."

At last they came in full view of the house. She caught her breath. It was the deadest thing she had ever seen. Evidently it had died with its owner in time immemorial. Its dead gray face was riddled with empty eye-sockets. It must have died ages and ages ago . . . Juliet was so frightened that she slipped her hand into

Mr. Townley's. He gave her a friendly glance. Then her father's voice claimed his attention.

"Don't want to inspect the old carcass, do you?"

Juliet shuddered as the import of this came home to her. She knew what a carcass was: the *Natural History* mentioned it, and she had asked Miss Anderson. An utterly dead body. So the Grange was worse than empty: it held the remains of that person who had not been too old to die—the person whom, perhaps, Miss Tiverton had known. Most mercifully, Mr. Townley did not wish to inspect the carcass.

They passed on, leaving the drive where it curved aside between empty flower-beds to the house, and entering upon a path that sloped gently downward, flanked by shrubberies. At the bottom of this path was a small gate opening into the field. Lying up there to the right, along the side of the valley, were all the gardens of Ashtree Avenue; and at the end of everything Miss Tiverton's wall ran down. And Juliet made a discovery: their own ash tree had companions other than those in Miss Tiverton's. In several of the gardens that lay in a line with that of Ashtree Towers were ash trees just like hers and theirs. And the fact suggested something—though she didn't know, for a moment, what it was. Then she realized that the ash trees had something to do with that thread of time immemorial which had seemed to be cut off by Grange Gardens. She couldn't go back now, but she decided to find out on the first opportunity whether these trees continued on the other side of Grange Gardens, in the direction of the copse.

Meanwhile her father and Mr. Townley tramped forward as stolidly as if such absorbing problems did not exist, only pausing at intervals to look (apparently) at the air. Their talk was much too stupid to listen to; but one bit of it caught, and held, her attention.

"It would increase their value," her father was saying; and he nodded toward Ashtree Avenue. "So near London, nobody's anxious to have a great tract of deserted ground

just over their wall. Nice gardens, sloping up to meet those, would be much more to the point."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Townley rather dryly. "But I don't know what our chances are of being able to bribe the old lady."

"I shall get possession, anyhow."

Mr. Townley looked dubious.

"Well, it might prove wise in the long run."

"It can't be a very long run at the worst. She's older than Methuselah."

"That's something. But I dare say she'll be willing to do a deal. It's a nuisance, though, in any case that we can't get out."

"A bit of a nuisance, I grant you, though not a serious obstacle. However, if she's bribable on the main point, we may get an outlet as well. There's a path already, you know. It used to be a private right of way."

Mr. Simpson strode on more quickly. Juliet, hurrying alongside Mr. Townley, puzzled over what they could mean. Was it that once you had gone inside the Grange gates you wouldn't be let out any more unless you bribed Miss Tiverton? Then why had they ever come? She understood that her father wanted to get possession of something; but still, it seemed a rash proceeding. And where would they sleep to-night if they were really shut in? Not—oh, she hoped not in the house that held the carcass! That was a dreadful possibility, and it filled her with dismay. Now they had come almost under their own garden, and were very near Miss Tiverton's; but there was obviously no way out. . . . Suddenly she had an inspiration.

"Father!" she cried excitedly, forgetting to be unobtrusive, "if you called, the ogre p'raps would throw over our ladder, and then we could get back into the garden."

Her father peered at her sidewise across Mr. Townley.

"Hold your cheeky tongue," he said. "I've not reckoned with you yet about your share in that ladder

business, my girl; and it may have cost me more than you think for.”

Juliet was completely baffled: she hadn't the very faintest idea of what he meant; but her bewilderment and her anxiety gave place to the all-absorbing interest of coming close to Miss Tiverton's wall. Now, surely, the west front of the house would be visible. . . . But there was scarcely a gap in the trees at this lower end of Miss Tiverton's garden, and from the sunk level on which they stood nothing could be seen except a gable and the dancing glint of sunshine on what seemed to be an attic window. Juliet, for a moment, was bitterly disappointed; but then again all disagreeable sensations were submerged in the joy of discovery. Her father and Mr. Townley had focussed their attention on a particular part of the wall. Incredible though it seemed, there was actually a barred gate, not wholly unlike the gate of her imagining. It looked as if it hadn't been opened for ages and ages: the lock, indeed, was all entangled with ivy that had its roots on Miss Tiverton's side of the wall; and the bars were thick with rust. Sidling up close to Mr. Townley, she managed to get a glimpse between them. The gate opened on to what had evidently been a path, but was now so overgrown with weeds as to be scarcely distinguishable from the sward on either side of it. By some acrobatic maneuver, she got her head into a position whence she could see, under Mr. Townley's elbow, a sort of wilderness sloping up from the right of this path. She couldn't see all she wanted to, but what she did see was exciting enough. Among rhododendron bushes and rank long grass was a sort of glorified flower-vase in discolored marble, standing on a pedestal, with creeping plants entwined about it and tumbling into it. Higher up, under the trees, was a rustic bench nearly fallen to pieces; and farther on, where the ground was less encumbered, a wire-netting enclosure with poultry strutting and clucking in the hot afternoon sun. . . .

The green path stretched on till it came to another

gate—a wooden one this time—set in the north wall which faced on the old road. Juliet, in her walks with Miss Anderson, had often passed that gate in the old road, but somehow had never realized it as opening into Miss Tiverton's, so far was it below the house.

For some minutes her companions gazed as intently as she did upon this unexpected and mysterious wilderness. Juliet, if she had thought of them at all, would have supposed them rapt like herself in fathomless wonder. She was not blind to the significance of the gate connecting the Grange field with Miss Tiverton's wilderness. Feverishly, she tried to piece things together. This must be the way by which the carcass had come to see Miss Tiverton when they lived alone together in time immemorial. . . . But it wouldn't have been a carcass then. What *would* it have been? In a flash the secret burst upon her: it would have been Miss Tiverton's lover. Not like Archie—a thousand times no! But a splendid prince, who walked delicately, dressed in cloth of gold. Every morning and every evening he would have followed the path through the field, opened this gate, turned aside from the path a little way up the slope, filled the flower-vase with flowers—pink and red and white and cream roses, and perhaps even blue ones—and waited, gazing through the trees, till Miss Tiverton came slowly down the shadowed slope in a very tall pointed hat with a veil hanging from it, and the cat just a pace or two behind her. Then they would have sat together on the rustic bench; while, if it was morning, the squirrel slid up and down the trees; and if it was evening, the owls hooted, but very gently and respectfully, and the sun lingered, smiling, on the brow of the opposite hill, to ask them if they were happy and to light the evening star (so that when he was gone each should still see the other's face), and the cat sat perfectly quiet beside the bench, no flicker of movement about it anywhere except in its eyes, which altered their luminous color as they reflected first the sunset and then the star. . . . Oh, it was heart-breaking that it

should all have ended! Why couldn't the prince have managed to live a little longer till he, also, was too old to die? Yet there could be no doubt about it: even if nothing had been said about the carcass, you would be sure that he had died; for it had not been thought necessary to mend the rustic bench, and the flower-vase was empty except for weeds, and ivy had twisted itself all round the latch of the gate, and the ogre kept poultry down here because no one else ever came.

Juliet's vision was blurred by tears. She had never before thought of Miss Tiverton and the cat as sorrowful; but now she saw that sorrowfulness was one of the things that set them and their house and their garden and their servants apart and alone in the world—sorrowfulness of a dim mysterious kind, not to be talked about, but only to be felt, like the first autumn morning, or a calm tide, or pansies at the end of summer. . . .

“You see?”

Juliet roused herself at that—interested to hear whether her father's deductions were the same as her own.

“It would be a great advantage to us. And all this jungle”—his thumb jerked toward the bench and the vase—“can't be any earthly use to the old woman. They say she never goes out-of-doors.”

“I don't know that old age and infirmity always makes 'em more amenable,” observed Mr. Townley. “Still, if she can be persuaded to annul the covenant, no doubt she might go farther. But to my mind that's a big 'if.'”

Juliet's father scowled.

“Surely not. It can only be a question of making it worth her while. It's not as if the old woman herself had sold the land—it was a father or uncle or some one. I doubt if she's even aware that the covenant exists.”

“You bet,” said Mr. Townley.

Mr. Simpson looked ferocious.

“I don't anticipate much trouble,” he said, in a thick agitated voice. “Money does the trick, most times. If

not, there's more than one way of making a neighbor sit up and take notice, 'specially when one's in possession here. I'm not altogether satisfied, for instance, about the closing of this right of way . . ."

"If I may suggest it," observed Mr. Townley mildly, "I should go carefully, even in the face of a preliminary refusal. You don't want to harden the opposition."

Mr. Simpson merely snorted.

Juliet had listened with her usual blank non-comprehension. The only definite thing she had gathered from this conversation was that her father's atmosphere was somehow clashing with Miss Tiverton's, whereas she had assumed him and Mr. Townley to be under the spell of the jungle, as she was. She considered whether a question would be possible: after all, she had nothing to lose by making her voice heard, since she had got into the Grange, and, as far as she understood the situation, would be unable to get out.

"Mr. Townley," she said softly, when her father's attention had reverted to the little map he carried, "what is it you and father are saying?"

He looked down at her with his nice, screwed-up smile.

"Not much that you'd understand, Miss Juliet. Watered down, it comes to a question of whether Miss Tiverton will allow your father to develop this estate."

"Develop?"

"Build a nice street of houses . . ."

"A street of houses *here!*" Juliet gasped. "Not *really?* And can Miss Tiverton stop him?"

"It so happens that she can. She's got what's called a restrictive covenant on this land. Long ago the two properties were in one; and your father can't put up more than two buildings here without her consent."

"She'll never let him build a street of houses!" Juliet cried.

Her father poked his head forward angrily.

"How much do you think *you* know about it?" he demanded.

“But how *could* she?” Juliet argued. “All Miss Tiverton’s land is time immemorial.”

“What do you mean?” said Mr. Townley, still smiling.

“Oh, leave her alone,” Mr. Simpson advised. “She’s got a screw loose—always had. I don’t know what she’s doing in here, anyway.”

Juliet, however, answered Mr. Townley.

“It’s something Miss Tiverton guards for ever and ever,” she explained in a whisper. “But if father wants to be building, there’s heaps of other places—if only she’ll let us out.”

PART TWO

FALSE DAWN

CHAPTER X

IN THE late autumn of that year Mr. Simpson suddenly gave up having even brief intervals of good temper. On inquiry, Juliet learned that Miss Tiverton, or somebody acting in Miss Tiverton's name, had refused her father's bribe: there could be no building at present—at least, none to speak of—on the Grange estate. Of course, Juliet had known that it would be so; but she thrilled with triumph at this uncompromising assertion of Miss Tiverton's rights. The secret joy of it rendered her immune from a noticeable increase of discomfort under the paternal roof. What did it matter that Leslie had definitely, though tacitly, declared war on her as a result of her rescuing the cat? What did it matter that Olive, detached from Archie (whether by her own will or their father's Juliet was not, at that time, sure), squabbled with every one on the slightest provocation? What did it matter that Angela was always languishing with a sick headache in any chair you had thought of occupying, or that Mrs. Simpson was constantly weeping because she could not get together any set of servants as "superior" as those who had left on account of Archie? What did it matter that they had suddenly become much poorer—or that Mr. Simpson said they had—"thanks to the old she-devil next door"? If this was true, and if by the "she-devil" he really meant Miss Tiverton, it was interesting, it was suggestive, and it was rather terrible as proving that Miss Tiverton had power over their destinies. But none of it

mattered in face of the splendid fact that Miss Tiverton was silently but surely protecting time immemorial.

That was all very well, until her father, tired of eating his heart out in bitter but usually inarticulate rage, proceeded to give practical and unmistakable proof of not being converted. It was a fearful business, her father becoming aggressive. Mr. Townley disapproved—spoke of its being a “short-sighted policy”; whereupon her father merely used men’s words at Mr. Townley, who continued, imperturbably, to disapprove; but (disappointingly) took no strong line in the matter, and was not even particularly offended. Olive said that their father was cracked; and this theory gained support from the lurid glint that invariably shot into his murky bottle-green eyes, and the blotched puffy look that came into his cheeks, whenever anybody mentioned the Grange.

He had decided to contest Miss Tiverton’s right to exclude him from her jungle path. He brought an action—by which Juliet understood that he had called in the police to make them say that the jungle path, and the vase and the bench and the chicken-run, were not all Miss Tiverton’s own. She never saw the police; nor could she see Miss Tiverton’s retinue defending the path; though sometimes, after dark, during those awful days when the action was going on, she would creep down the length of Miss Tiverton’s wall to the angle of its junction with their own (as being the nearest point to the scene of conflict), crouch there and listen. . . . It was a tragedy to be, for life, on the wrong side of that wall, knowing that, whether her father lost or won, time immemorial could never again be approached by any member of a household which had put this affront upon it. Why, even if they—that is, her father—were allowed to go through the jungle, it would become nothing but grass and bushes the moment he set foot in it: time immemorial would merely recede from it, draw up the slope, gather itself close into the shelter of Miss Tiverton’s ash trees. . . .

The only hope would be to get over the wall, range herself with the ogre and the witch-woman and the cat. But she couldn't do it: they wouldn't let her. She was a member of the Simpson family, which would stand to Miss Tiverton for all that was disgraceful. It wouldn't be any good saying, even to the cat, that she detested her father's doings: the cat would look at her coldly, contemptuously, remembering what a fraud her father's conversion had been. It would show that it simply couldn't believe in any one on the Simpson's side of the wall wanting the right things. Besides, the cat never came now. However long she waited, crouching under the wall, and shivering, and straining her ears to catch the least sound, it wouldn't come near her. Shards of glass had recently been put all along its particular bit of wall (illegally, Olive said, and no one contradicted her); but Juliet didn't mainly connect its not coming with that.

She heard at last that her father had lost his case, which was only to be expected; but she regained nothing. Always now she had a stifled languid feeling somewhere deep down, as though some part of her were panting for means of life; but the thing it needed was gone out of reach, and would remain so for ever—unless, indeed, she were to find a way of getting apart from her family, becoming simply Juliet instead of Juliet Simpson.

It was in the spring, after Olive's elopement with a veterinary surgeon, that Juliet's parents decided to send her to Miss Calthrop's School. An additional reason had been Miss Anderson's deciding to join a married sister in the colonies; but the chief reason was, undoubtedly, Olive's elopement, or, as Mrs. Simpson put it, Olive's influence. Juliet could not altogether follow her mother's line of reasoning, though it was true that she had helped Olive in small ways which were considered culpable when they came to light—such ways, for instance, as carrying notes and messages, and, in the last magnificent crisis,

smuggling Olive's suit-case into the veterinary surgeon's car just round the corner of Ashtree Avenue. She would always be glad that she had done these things. It had comforted her a little, to be helping some one to get away from the Simpsons. Moreover, as Olive emphatically pointed out, the vet was an immense improvement on Archie, who, when the big row came, had proved himself "a milksop, and a blithering ass into the bargain." The vet was burly and strong and bluff, with a loud voice and a hearty laugh, and a genuine affection, if not quite enough reverence, for Miss Tiverton's cat. Strangely enough, it was the cat who had brought him and Olive together—though, as things were, it could hardly have intended to confer this benefit on a member of the Simpson family. But (even more strangely) the cat was ill; so it might not have known exactly what it was doing. One day, when Olive had just started out in the two-seater, something went wrong with its mechanism close to Miss Tiverton's front gate, where the vet's car was standing. The vet appeared in the nick of time, and helped Olive in her difficulty. As the cat required further medical attention, he and Olive encountered each other on two more occasions: then Olive bought a puppy. The puppy, for a while, was obstinately healthy; but at last it got distemper. The vet proved to be a very approachable person: he allowed Juliet to question him (shyly she did it, and with an almost guilty feeling, as if she had no right to the information) about his wonderful experience of going to doctor the cat; but he had disappointingly little to tell. He had never seen Miss Tiverton, and although he used to go in at the front door, he had always been conducted straight down-stairs into the basement, where he interviewed the cat in its basket in the housekeeper's room. He didn't seem to remember anything about the geography of the house, and couldn't even say whether the front door was really green, with a porch. He had not met the ogre nor the witch-woman, though he recollected having seen a hen walk past a back door that led into

the yard. He said the cat was a fine beast, and well cared for, and an excellent patient, and quite well again now. "Only a tempery trouble," he said. (No, it hadn't got a bad temper as far as he knew: why did Miss Juliet think so?) With this she had to rest content; and although he seemed to have made so little of his opportunities, an ineffable glamour established itself around him by reason of his intimacy with the cat. Of course, Juliet had helped. . . .

Angela, even if she could or would have done so, had been too much preoccupied in being helped. She had been going into a decline (so she said); and Olive told Juliet in confidence that it was because of Mr. Lethbridge hanging fire. And now Mr. Lethbridge had decided to exchange his present curacy for the charge of a mission church in the neighborhood of the docks. The docks not being within Angela's horizon, she would lose him altogether unless something were done. So Olive did something—exactly what, Juliet never knew. But it involved a private interview, and Mr. Lethbridge, who had arrived in his usual boyish high spirits, went away looking as if he was going to be shot. For a whole week after that he was exclusively engaged with parish duties, while Angela went down-hill more rapidly. Then one evening he turned up again; spent half an hour with Angela in the summer-house; and finally marched indoors, making for the library where Mr. Simpson was. Juliet happened to see him as he crossed the hall, and thought how funny it was that he should go to see her father if he hated him as much as (judging from his expression) he evidently did. That same night Olive told her that Angela was "fixed up"—adding, with a shrug and a grimace: "though I'm blowed if I know what she'll make of the London docks." Olive remarked, furthermore, that now Angela's business was settled, there was nothing for *her* to wait for. And the look in her face, when she said that, held something of the quality that you noticed in her voice when she sang.

The row about Olive was not so big as you might have expected. It started terribly big, like one of those cracks of thunder that seem to be going to tear the world up by its roots; and then, as thunder so often does, it somehow trailed away. Mr. Simpson, consumed by a sort of savage restlessness, seemed incapable of bothering for long about anything except his recent purchase, the Grange—on which, according to his own statements, he was losing huge sums every day and hour and minute. Juliet, of course, could not understand why possessing the Grange should make him so poor: she thought it must have something to do with a slot-machine, like the one at the stations which enabled you to support a great hospital with a penny. Perhaps her father had a slot-machine for the Grange, and Miss Tiverton (or some one acting for her) had been taking pennies out. Anyhow, there was just this advantage in it—that as Olive herself had shrewdly anticipated, he was glad to get rid of a daughter with ample excuse for not giving her a dowry. Besides, once Olive had departed, there was really no one on whom the row could spend itself. Angela yawned when the subject was mentioned, and said what could you expect after mother's father. Leslie giggled, and remarked that Olive, with her "mug," was lucky to have nabbed a husband at any price. Perhaps it was the parental—or rather, the maternal—sence of impotence that brought Juliet into unwonted attention. Leslie had spied upon some of her helpful little doings, and was not slow to drop hints. Mrs. Simpson had been told of her part, or what Mr. Simpson believed to have been her part, in the Archie episode. If they could do nothing else, at least they could send Juliet to school—to mix with nice girls, her mother said tearfully, and learn to appreciate her social position. But it was Mrs. Simpson's idea—Mrs. Simpson's protest. Mr. Simpson had nothing to say in the matter except that the school must be a cheap one.

It was arranged very hurriedly. Miss Calthrop's school had a reputation for "selectness," yet was not expensive.

The vicar's daughters went there; so Mrs. Simpson approached the vicar's wife. Did she think Miss Calthrop would have a vacancy this term? or, if she had not, would she be likely to make an exception and find a niche for Juliet, since school was so urgently necessary? The vicar's wife was not quite sure: she seemed embarrassed. It wasn't easy, she said, to get into Miss Calthrop's: how about Mrs. Simpson trying one of the other day schools with which the neighborhood abounded? But Mrs. Simpson wouldn't hear of another school if there was a chance of Miss Calthrop's. "What I care about for Juliet," she protested, "is the social tone. Olive went to a high school when we lived in Ealing, and—you see! Dear Angela was too delicate to go anywhere, and I'm thankful for it: Mr. Lethbridge is quite thoroughbred. Oh, yes: in this neighborhood Miss Calthrop's is the school for Juliet."

After some further demur the vicar's wife agreed to "sound" Miss Calthrop; and the result of the sounding was that Miss Calthrop consented to admit Juliet to a temporary vacancy which had occurred through the illness of one of her pupils, suggesting that perhaps by next term, if this pupil returned, Mrs. Simpson would have had time to make other arrangements.

Juliet went with her mother to see Miss Calthrop a few days before the term began. They went in the car, although the house was quite near, in the road which lay opposite along the top of the valley; for Mrs. Simpson's use of the car was habitually regulated by more subtle considerations than the length of her journey. Juliet wore her best clothes. They were very "best" indeed; and, despite her pride in them, she did not really enjoy them. But on this occasion her mother insisted that they should be worn.

She paid little attention to what her mother and Miss Calthrop said. At first, she was engrossed in studying Miss Calthrop. There was something about the personality of the head mistress that stirred a vague elusive memory.

Her whole face said things—calm, sure, other-worldly things, like the music in church; yet you perceived that it could at a moment's notice say a set of wholly different things—only still without losing the church-music serenity. Miss Calthrop could be angry, but she would never get into a temper. She could be harsh, but she would never be rude. She could disapprove of you intensely, but she would still do her duty by you. At this point Juliet's deductions received partial confirmation from a glance of Miss Calthrop's which met her own, and, undoubtedly, held more than a tinge of criticism. Juliet nervously rearranged the frills of her very short *cerise* taffeta frock, and turned her attention from Miss Calthrop's face to the room. But in that meeting of glances she had suddenly remembered of whom it was that Miss Calthrop reminded her—the nurse who had attended her nearly two years ago, after she had tasted the poisoned milk.

Miss Calthrop's drawing-room reminded her of nothing. It bore no resemblance whatever to the drawing-room of Ashtree Towers, where all the furniture either shone or glittered, and everything remained as elegant and neat and stagey as when the big London firm had first arranged it. And certainly, though nothing in it shone with newness, neither did anything shimmer with the mystery of time immemorial. It was an extraordinarily dull room. What struck her most, however, was the vast number of photographs—"midget" photographs, ranged in long frames which held perhaps a dozen each. They were all photographs of girls—very plain, many of them, and podgy-faced, with heavy, plastered-down hair: here and there only would be one who looked as if some day she might, in Leslie's phrase, "nab a husband." Juliet felt sorry that there should be so many in the world who could never possibly attach to themselves a sweetheart—unless, of course, like Olive, they were "characters." She examined her own features in a small mirror that hung opposite her chair, deciding with satisfaction that she was quite different from the majority of those girls. Not that she

could imagine herself particularly wanting a sweetheart; but it would be an awful thing (so she had always heard) to be the sort of person who couldn't have one. She raised her arms, tilted her somewhat overpowering hat to a more becoming angle, drew down a wisp of hair so that it lay prettily across her forehead. And just then she intercepted another glance of Miss Calthrop—this time unmistakably disapproving.

"Well, I think we've settled everything, Mrs. Simpson," said Miss Calthrop in her pleasantly modulated voice. "I will arrange for your daughter to take music. Has she any special aptitude?"

"I—I don't quite know," Mrs. Simpson answered. "Have you, Juliet?"

"Have I what?" said Juliet blankly.

"Miss Calthrop says, have you any special aptitude?"

"What's aptitude?" Juliet asked.

But Miss Calthrop intervened with another question—speaking, Juliet thought, rather coldly.

"What were your favorite studies with your governess?"

"I liked natural history and Grimm," said Juliet vaguely. "But that wasn't so much with Miss Anderson."

"She's a very clever child," Mrs. Simpson broke in brightly. "Very clever indeed. All my girls are. Especially poor dear Olive. You know, Miss Calthrop, it's a dreadful thing—Olive, my second daughter, who only went to a high school, has actually run off with a veterinary surgeon, just as if she wasn't a near relation of Earl Templewood, of Templewood House—my dear father's cousin. Mr. Simpson and I——"

"Yes, but Olive liked granny best," said Juliet eagerly. "She'd have liked to help granny run her——"

"Juliet! Hold your tongue! How *dare* you argue? You see, Miss Calthrop?" Mrs. Simpson flung out her hands. "You see the influence there is to undo!"

Miss Calthrop's face had become mask-like, just as the nurse's used to be sometimes.

"I hope your daughter will benefit by coming here," she said quietly; "though I can not promise, as you know, that it will be for more than a term. There is just one thing, Mrs. Simpson—a detail. My girls do not wear a uniform, exactly; but it is understood that they shall dress very simply on week-days during term-time, and I am particular about the plain straw hat with the school band."

Mrs. Simpson looked warmly interested.

"Why, yes, I quite understand, Miss Calthrop." She surveyed her daughter critically. "I'm sure Juliet wouldn't mind at all. I think the plain dressing would really suit her *pickant* style, don't you? She's not a girl that pays for dressing in the ordinary way, but she's got a little style of her own, don't you think, Miss Calthrop?"

Miss Calthrop made a movement as if to rise.

"I never saw a child look the worse for plain dressing," she said in a toneless voice.

Mrs. Simpson played with the fastenings of her gloves, and rearranged her feather boa.

"Now if it had been Angela," she went on, foaming up at last out of her chair, "if it had been Angela, I don't know that I *could* have agreed. Such a lovely child from her very birth! I don't know if you've ever seen my Angela, Miss Calthrop, but you must come to her wedding. I get quite excited, thinking what a bride she'll make! Mr. Lethbridge, you know—— Such a splendid man, don't you think? Such true humility! From the way he devotes himself to the poor, one would never guess what he'd really been born to. But he'll have the title one day; and I hope it won't be long before Winscote is vacant—the family living, you know. His people and mine are almost neighbors in Gloucestershire, so it makes the connection doubly welcome.—Well, Miss Calthrop, I must be thinking of going. I've enjoyed our talk, and I hope Juliet will be a good girl. You must have tea with me some day, and tell me all about her. Juliet, come along."

But Juliet, who had found her way to the window, was absorbed. She had not, until just now, fully realized the

position of the school: it was almost opposite Miss Tiverton's. A trim garden ran down as far as the Grange field; and there, a little to the left, up on the valley-side, was a glimmer of sun-burnished windows through dark trees. . . . Through the trees also showed great blobs of pinky-white, which must be apple-blossom, and patches of very green grass. Down a winding path, which seemed to lead between shrubs from the witch-woman's cottage to the jungle at the bottom of Miss Tiverton's, came a hobbling black figure carrying something that looked like a sieve. The valley was full to bursting with hot April sunshine, and the aimless clucking of hens, and the carol of thrushes, and the scent of every flower known to spring. But none of it, surely, came from Miss Calthrop's garden: that seemed strangely empty and unalive, though, with the window standing open, you could have smelled and heard anything there was. And none of it came from their own garden, ablaze with a monotonous splendor of red-and-yellow tulips. It was all in Miss Tiverton's and the Grange—all the sad exciting mystery of spring. Ah! There was a cuckoo. . . . Yes, that would be in the trees up near the carcass-house. And from Miss Tiverton's something answered the monotonous, repeated cry—something that had a mocking twinkle in its voice: "Can't you stow it? Can't you stow it? Can't you stow it?" The hobbling figure had now come nearly to the bottom of the slope—was skirting the edge of Miss Tiverton's jungle. Such a babel from the hens! Now the little bird was laughing at them: "Just you go it! Just you go it! Just you go it!" And one of the west windows up there on the valley-side stirred and blinked. . . . Time to wake up: time to get ready. . . . But for what? There was always in spring-time this urgent call to get ready; and you did get ready: you felt all big with readiness. But you never found out what it was for. And now the little bird sang to her, with its head on one side (it was as if she could see): "Don't you know it? Don't you know it? Don't you know it?" They knew in time

immemorial, where she would never be again. A terrible home-sickness came surging over her. . . . And suddenly the far-off, glinting window became an expression: not a face, exactly, but an expression. If it had been a face, it would have been the face of a woman with swathed red hair—sunset hair, and burning dark eyes which at once pierced and evaded you: a woman who had no age, but only knowledge: a woman who smiled at you because there really was something to smile about, but something so dim, so distant, that it might take you all your life to find it. A sweet, sad, amused smile. “Don’t you know it? Don’t you know it? Don’t you know it?” But it wasn’t a face: it wasn’t even an expression: it was a window with the sun on it. Juliet drew a sharp breath. Nothing. . . . Nothing. . . . Yet an unforgettable experience, a possession, a secret of the west front escaping through the guardian trees.

“Juliet! Have you gone to sleep? What are you looking at?”

Her mother and Miss Calthrop had drifted to the window.

“What a beautiful garden! What a charming view!” Mrs. Simpson purred. “Why, I declare that’s our own garden we see. Very effective it looks from here, don’t you think, Miss Calthrop? And so it ought, I’m sure, with all we spend on it. Have you any tennis-courts, Miss Calthrop?”

“Not adjoining the house. I am obliged to hire a court for my girls some little distance away. I had half hoped, when the Grange estate came on the market——” Miss Calthrop stopped abruptly, looking confused—which was the last thing you would have expected her to be able to look. But Mrs. Simpson eagerly took up the unfinished sentence.

“Oh, you mean you would have liked to make use of the field?”

“Not for tennis, of course. The expense of making

a court would have been too heavy. I was thinking more of the other games—rounders, and cricket, and hockey.”

“You know the Grange is my husband’s property!”

“Yes. But I had forgotten when I spoke.”

“I don’t see myself why he shouldn’t allow you to use the field, especially with Juliet a scholar here. I must talk to him about it.”

“No, please don’t.” Miss Calthrop spoke hurriedly. “No doubt Mr. Simpson has other views for his land, and my present arrangements are quite adequate.”

“But I should love to do you a service, Miss Calthrop! Of course, I can’t *answer* for Mr. Simpson, but still— Did you ever approach him about it?”

“Something passed on the subject.” Miss Calthrop was as nearly fidgeting as dignity would allow. “I don’t wish to reopen it.”

“Ah, but I could. A wife’s privileges, you know. What were his objections exactly, Miss Calthrop?”

“It’s more than a year ago. I don’t think we need go back on it, even in discussion.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Simpson confidentially, “my husband has his schemes for the Grange. But, after all, it’s a beauty spot, isn’t it? Mr. Simpson always tries to act in the public interest, and I’m sure I shall be glad myself if he decides to leave the old place as it is for the present.”

“But I thought,” Juliet interposed, in the shrill voice of flapperhood, “that father wasn’t building on the Grange estate because Miss Tiverton won’t let him. I thought that was what he’s in such a frightful wax about.”

“Juliet, really! Juliet, you *impertinent* child! Miss Calthrop, I’m ashamed. It just shows, doesn’t it, how terribly school is needed? I don’t know what you *must* think!”

Miss Calthrop didn’t say what she thought: Juliet and her mother found themselves got rid of as speedily and naturally as if they had been really ready to go.

Juliet heard little of the voluble recriminations with which her mother occupied herself during the short drive home. She was wrapped in anxious, expectant thought. What was it, exactly, that the face—no, the window, had meant to say to her? She felt as if forgiveness, hope, even a kind of benediction, had been held out to her. But she could never have seen it from Ashtree Towers—only from somewhere right away and outside. She thought hard, and harder. Could it mean that Miss Tiverton was glad she was going to spend a great deal of time in a place apart from her family? Did it mean, perhaps, that going to Miss Calthrop's was a step toward becoming Juliet rather than Juliet Simpson? Did it mean that although time immemorial could never again be approached from Ashtree Towers, there might be other ways in?

CHAPTER XI

THE windows of the schoolroom at Miss Calthrop's, where Juliet found herself one morning at the end of that month, looked in the same direction as those of the drawing-room.

In this morning light she could scarcely make out the high west window of Miss Tiverton's house: apparently it only came to life in the sunset. Would that be it—that grayness between the tree-tops? If it had had white paint round it, like the windows of Ashtree Towers, she would have been able to tell.

A flashing movement near the witch-woman's cottage caught and deflected her glance: something snow-white was throwing itself about in the sun and the wind. Her heart stood still: had the witch-woman or the ogre turned into another shape? You wouldn't have expected them to do it in broad daylight on a Monday morning. But, after all, she knew very little of what they did. Though she had spent innumerable hours within a stone's throw of them, she had never had the chance of seeing as she could see from here.

"Juliet! I am accustomed to be listened to when I speak."

Bother Miss Calthrop! Juliet reluctantly, almost painfully, withdrew her gaze, turned it inward toward the upper end of the room. A few seconds later, when Miss Calthrop was saying something to the older girls in particular, and therefore looking at them over Juliet's head, she began again to watch the phenomenon in the witch-woman's yard. And then the explanation jumped to her eye: it was a bit of "washing" hung out on a line. Somehow she felt as if it were Miss Calthrop's fault that it had turned out to be only that; and in the same moment she knew that she would never like Miss Calthrop.

As the morning wore on, she had the novel experience of producing a sensation. Staid, bespectacled mistresses, who looked, when they sat down at their desks, as if they must have been born with that particular expression of resigned non-expectancy, became, one after another, morally disheveled as they stumbled into the abysses of Juliet's ignorance. Her fellow-pupils, who had come to class with an air of having concentrated their very souls on being brightly efficient and well-bred, lapsed into gaping and even giggles.

"I think, Juliet," the arithmetic teacher said restrainedly at last, "it would be simpler if you were to tell me what you *do* know."

"I can add and subtract," Juliet answered soothingly. "At least, p'raps I can't always do it very well, but I know how it's done."

The geography teacher lost patience with her altogether.

"I really wonder at your coming here," she snapped.

Juliet surveyed her with curiosity.

"I've come to be taught things," she said, wondering that the teacher should be so stupid as not to see that. Her remark brought a flush of wrath to the teacher's face; but the wrath burst upon some other girls who, for all their prim appearance, had spluttered suddenly in a way that recalled Olive, and made Juliet feel much more at home with them.

At the hour of "recess" she went out into the garden among them all with greater confidence than would have been possible if she had not come to realize herself as a rather unusual personality.

But she only hovered on the outskirts of the little groups into which her companions formed themselves. They all knew one another, and at first were too much engrossed with common interests to take notice of a stranger. Juliet, however, was well content: she recognized her opportunity, as a listener and onlooker, of getting to know something about them.

One group was discussing Miss Calthrop.

“Doesn't she look a perfect *angel* in that new blouse?”

“She always looks an angel; but I really liked the mauve one she had last term a teeny bit the best.”

“Oh, *no!* Blue's her color, with those eyes! Margaret, don't you think so?”

“Think what?”

Juliet looked closely at the tall girl who drew near in answer to their appeal. She had a thoughtful, pleasing face, and a quiet dignity of manner that gave her distinction among her schoolfellows.

“Isn't blue Miss Calthrop's color?”

“No, mauve! Margaret, do say mauve!”

“Why, but Miss Calthrop always looks as nice as possible, whatever she wears.”

“Oh, Margaret, do you know, she's still got the flowers I sent her from Brockenhurst! Isn't it perfectly sweet of her to have kept them? They're really beginning to fade.”

“People who love flowers like she does never throw them away till the last minute.”

“I do *wish* I'd sent her some, like Dora. But I'm so dreadfully shy. I'll tell you a secret, only you mustn't tell Edith Howe or Mary Field or Doris Parker—any of you. They wouldn't understand. Promise?”

“Of course we shan't tell, if you say it's a secret,” Margaret answered tranquilly.

“Well then—I picked Miss Calthrop the most heavenly bunch of flowers, where we were in Surrey. I meant to send them, honestly I did. I even got a cardboard box from a draper's. And then I just didn't *dare!* So I put them in water and loved them and cherished them because they were really *hers*—in spirit, if you know what I mean. And when they died I pressed them, so as it would be like having something of hers. But you must never tell . . .”

The majority of her audience looked moved: only Margaret's face was unresponsive.

“I think it's a pity you didn't send them,” she said. “Miss Calthrop would have been just as pleased with yours as with Dora's.”

“Ah! But I’m so dreadfully shy. You don’t know how I suffer with it! And of course it makes one very lonely. People overlook one, if one can’t express one’s feelings. But it’s the way I’m made; so I suppose I shall have to bear it, even if it does mean being misunderstood.”

“I don’t think any one misunderstands you, Ada.”

“Ah, you don’t know! But I’m so dreadfully sensitive—I always know what I’m losing by my shyness. I think that’s so wonderful in the Bible—‘the heart knoweth its own bitterness.’ I’ve taken it for my motto. It’s all very well for *you* to talk, Margaret, but we can’t all be strong-minded.”

Another group joined itself to this one before Ada had quite finished her sigh.

“I say, Margaret!” cried the leader of the new contingent. “D’you know whether anything’s happened yet about this playing-field business?”

“Miss Calthrop hasn’t been able to find anything nearer than Golding Park.”

“Oh, goodness! So we’ve still got to trudge all that way—in the summer, too. How perfectly rotten!”

“You’ll get an order-mark,” said Margaret, smiling, “if mademoiselle overhears your slang.”

“Mademoiselle’s decent enough to keep her ears shut the first few days of term. One can’t get rid of holiday habits all in a minute. *You* don’t have holiday habits, do you, Margaret?”

“Oh well, I expect I do. But I’ve only got one brother to your three!”

“Don’t you feel sick, though,” another voice broke in, “about the playing-field? When I see all that waste ground down there, it makes me fairly wild. Why shouldn’t we use it? Specially as father says that old beast Simpson——”

Juliet, who had been watching Margaret, and receiving from her an occasional glance of friendly encouragement, was surprised at the sudden change that came into the older girl’s face: it looked almost panic-stricken.

“Dorothea! Do be quiet! Do remember——” Her eyes flashed over Juliet for an instant, as though to bring her under the notice of the offending Dorothea.

Dorothea lifted her shoulders sulkily, and half turned away.

“Oh, sorry! I did forget. And after all, it’s rather unexpected, isn’t it?”

That cryptic remark conveyed nothing to Juliet at the moment: she did not even think about it, so intently was she studying Margaret. Counsel received long ago from the nurse with the grave eyes had come back into her mind: “If you ever go to school, make friends with any one who seems nice.” Margaret seemed nice: the nurse would have thought her so; and whatever it was that had smiled in the sunset window would think so too.

Dorothea had drifted away, taking the other girls with her. Only Margaret lingered, looking rather shyly at Juliet, as if she were wondering what to say.

Juliet went right up to her.

“If you don’t mind,” she began, “I should like to make friends with you.”

Margaret smiled—that is, she obviously tried to smile; but her embarrassment, which seemed to be increasing, made havoc of the attempt.

“Yes, of course,” she said hurriedly. “I try to be friends with every one. But we shall be in different classes, as I’m so much older than you.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Juliet said, “I can walk with you in recess, and you can come to tea with me on Saturdays, and have me to tea with you.”

A slight color mounted in Margaret’s cheeks.

“But—but you’ll be making friends with girls of your own age.”

“I don’t think I shall. Dora and Ada and Dorothea are all younger than you, but they’re not nice. Dora and Ada are silly asses—Ada especially; and Dorothea’s a rude beast!”

Margaret stared at her almost with horror.

“Juliet, how *can* you? You *mustn't* say such things!”

“But”—Juliet stared back—“I thought you thought so yourself.”

“No, indeed I don't—at least, not altogether. It *was* rather unfortunate just now; but you must try to forget that. Dorothea didn't mean it. And as for Dora and Ada, it's much too soon for you to judge. You don't know them.”

“You can tell at once who's nice. I know you are, but I haven't seen you for longer than those others.”

Margaret laughed nervously.

“I wonder why you like me so much?”

“I s'pose partly because you stopped Dorothea saying things about my father. What she said was quite right, really; but of course it *was* beastly rude of her to say it before me.”

Margaret's shyness had given place to wide-eyed astonishment.

“But, Juliet, how *can* you say she was right?”

“Why not, if I know he's even wickeder than she thinks?”

Margaret seemed really shocked, for the second time in their interview.

“We mustn't criticize our parents.”

“What does ‘criticize’ mean?”

“Say things—think things against them. They know best—at least, if they didn't, we ought to think they do.”

Juliet knitted her brows.

“But you haven't got to *pretend*,” she argued. “If you know your father's very wicked——”

“Well, you just oughtn't to know it,” said Margaret testily.

Juliet shook her head.

“I don't understand, honestly I don't. But there's heaps of things I don't understand. I expect you could teach me. You will, please, won't you, Margaret?”

Margaret's expression undoubtedly softened; yet she said with relief:

“There’s the bell. Recess is over.”

Juliet turned and walked with her toward the house.

“What’s your other name?” she asked.

“Sadler. Margaret Sadler.”

“It’s not a very pretty surname, but it’s nicer than Simpson. Please, Margaret, will you come to tea on Saturday?”

“I don’t think I can, Juliet. I should have to ask mother, anyhow, and I’m almost sure I can’t. But we will walk together sometimes, in recess.”

For Juliet, coming out of school, the day might have held only one episode—her meeting with Margaret Sadler. The incidents of the school routine had had no real significance for her. She had been put in certain places; had been told to stand up or sit down; had been asked questions and required to learn things. She had eaten and drunk, and gone out at the end of a long file of girls, and had found nothing to say to the mistress with whom she walked, though the girl on the mistress’s other side seemed capable of endless conversation. At intervals throughout the day she had been given books with pages marked in them, and asked, impressively, sometimes impatiently, as if she were an idiot, whether she was sure she understood what she had to “prepare” for to-morrow; and she had said, in the last few cases, that she did understand, because she had noticed that it seemed to cause a good deal of worry and delay if she said she didn’t. Finally, she had been told to put on her things and go home, and not to forget her lesson books, and to bring a satchel to-morrow. It was certainly rather awkward carrying the books without one, and she spilled them all over the door-step when some one jostled against her while she was waiting for Margaret to come out. She hoped that Margaret might have to walk part of the same way home.

Margaret helped her to pick up the books, but shook her head when Juliet proposed their going together.

“I live in quite the other direction,” she said. “Up

near the heath. Good night, Juliet. I hope you'll get on nicely with your home-work."

The net result of it all was simply Margaret. The sheaf of books, which kept on collapsing in the middle and having to be pushed up from underneath, whereupon it began to collapse from one end, was a tiresome eccentricity of Fate; but quite bearable if you regarded it as the price to be paid for Margaret.

She had not gone many yards when two or three voices called after her. She turned: in front of Miss Calthrop's stood a car, which she recognized, with surprise, as her father's. A good many girls were still hanging about the entrance: they shrugged and giggled as if they had some joke among themselves.

"It was nearly a tragedy," Dorothea said to her, winking at the others, as she came back among them. "You might have had to *walk!*"

"But I'm going to walk," Juliet answered, wondering. "At least—is mother here?"

The chauffeur, looking sheepish, stood holding open the door of the car. It was he who answered.

"No, miss. I'm to go straight home?"

"Yes, I s'pose so, if you've come just for me." Juliet hesitated, subtly affected by those groups of girls who, though they had turned away, were still shrugging and giggling. She felt that they disapproved of the car. Flinging her books before her on to the seat, she got in; then caught sight of Margaret with a schoolfellow, their figures growing small along the road. A possibility occurred to her.

"Drive after those two girls," she said to the chauffeur, "and stop when you come to them."

"Margaret!" she called, leaning out. "Please get in, and I'll drive you home."

Margaret stopped, looked round: the embarrassed look which came to her face so easily was now mingled with surprise. "No, thank you," she said. "It would be out of your way, and I'd rather walk."

Juliet, just before the car moved off, noticed in Margaret's companion that convulsive shake and heave of the shoulders which seemed to be a sort of physical affliction with Dorothea and her kindred spirits. She couldn't understand it; but it wasn't worth troubling about, for Margaret's back view displayed no such vagaries. She wished that Margaret had accepted her offer. But she was not hurt by the refusal: she also would have preferred to walk.

During tea Leslie asked her whether they had measured her yet for a dunce's cap; but otherwise no particular interest was shown at home in her first day at school. Her mother and Angela were engaged with a dressmaker; for Angela had already set to work on her trousseau, though the wedding was not to take place until July.

After tea a restlessness came over her: she was unwontedly conscious of having nothing to do. The lesson books which the chauffeur had collected out of the car and placed on the hall table did not suggest a remedy for this: she merely wondered, as her eye fell on them, whether she would be expected to carry them all back in the morning. Then she remembered that she had been told to bring a satchel. Well, she hadn't got one, and she was certain that Leslie would refuse to lend her his. Perhaps her mother could buy one for her some time: meanwhile, the books would do very well where they were. She decided to go for a walk.

Mechanically her steps turned in the direction of Grange Gardens. In a few minutes she was peering through the open iron-work of the Grange gate, into the gloom of trees that hid the carcass-house. The spring dusk had begun to fall; and as she looked and listened, she was struck by the intensity and independence of the life inhabiting this quiet place. The homing birds, with their ceaseless chatter and argument; the sleepless primroses, looking up at her with their pale serene faces; the great trees, absorbed in the silent mystery of their reclothing; the squirrels

(there were several of them now) who scrambled down a rough trunk, dug for a moment in the moist earth, and swung up again with a treasure between their teeth—all these seemed to unite in a curious assertiveness that was like a challenge. It seemed to Juliet that they laughed at the idea of belonging to her father: they meant something and knew that they meant something, which her father could never possess. And yet, if her father had his way, all this life would be broken up. Other life had actually been broken up; long since, she had traced the line of ash trees, in gardens and on roadsides, as far as the copse—or rather, the place where the copse had been, for it was almost completely devastated now. And in the light of maturing knowledge she had found sadness and fear, rather than triumph in this thin, persistent thread of time immemorial. She saw the ash trees as tragic survivors: their world had been cut away from underneath and around them. Her father's hand had done it, and her father's hand was not altogether stayed even now. It hung, threatening, over the Grange, though Miss Tiverton was taking care that it should not commit all the havoc he desired. He could not build a street of houses; but he could build to a certain extent, and all the life that challenged her on this April evening might one day be dispersed or destroyed. Of these clustered, mothering, happy trees there might remain just one, to throw its arms desolately now toward Miss Tiverton's, now toward the place where the copse had been. . . . Her father wouldn't let the Grange field to Miss Calthrop: that would be because he knew that at any moment he might begin to cut it up.

Juliet leaned her forehead against the bars of the gate—looking at the leaves that trembled against a copper-washed sky. That glimpse of sky, and the fresh cool wind, gave her what she called the feeling of beyondness, and relieved, by a little, her apprehensions. For there *was* something beyond: there was Miss Tiverton's. There would always be Miss Tiverton's; and Miss Tiverton was protecting her world from utter destruction.

A noise like the drawing of bottle-corks drew her eyes to a nearer branch of the tree through which she had been looking. A gray squirrel was cocking its ears at her, and irritably wagging its tail. She met its gaze compassionately.

"It'll be all right for you," she whispered. "You'll be able to go to Miss Tiverton's."

Miss Tiverton's would be very full, she reflected—a sort of Noah's Ark. But Miss Tiverton and the cat, in their beautiful, sorrowful loneliness, wouldn't mind . . .

The gray squirrel, however, seemed suspicious of her consolations: it continued to wave its tail and make queer noises. She thought it must be telling her to go. She was accustomed, since the affair of the jungle path, to feel herself boycotted by Miss Tiverton's *protégés*; but this gray squirrel seemed really hostile. Just then she caught sight of something that riveted her attention—a thin straight stick, about two feet high, standing upright in the ground. Gradually, her eyes grown used to the gloaming, she discerned in its neighborhood other identical sticks. And at last she found that the whole place was riddled with them. They looked as if they had been put there to mark something—she couldn't imagine what; but she was sure that they had to do with her father and Mr. Townley (who seemed usually to act together), and equally sure that they accounted for the squirrel's wrath. She felt deeply depressed: it was a miserable state of things, this being condemned for her family's doings. But then hope returned to her, as she remembered how that very day she had taken the first step toward becoming something other than Juliet Simpson; how she had set foot already in a sphere very different from the sphere of the Simpsons. She was going to become "nice," under Margaret's tuition. She saw now that she had never been what is called a "nice" girl. Niceness, like the nurse had meant, didn't belong to the Simpsons. But you could get it, just as Olive, after one false start, had got realness with her vet. And then people (and squirrels) wouldn't muddle you up with

your family, or hold you responsible for the disgusting things done by your father. If some day you married, and had a house of your own, other nice people would call. Even Miss Tiverton—no, Miss Tiverton would never go out to call, on the nicest person in the world; but perhaps she would let you in. The expression of that sunset window had seemed to promise that, on some very distant day, she would.

Juliet thought again of Margaret, and of things that Margaret had said to her. A good deal of it had been puzzling. At Miss Calthrop's they evidently disapproved of her father, which was only right and proper: they called him—at least, Dorothea did—an "old beast." Yet Margaret, who was obviously much nicer than Dorothea, had seemed to defend him: at all events, she had blamed Juliet for agreeing with Dorothea. She had said, in effect, that it wasn't Juliet's business to know if her father was wicked. But if you didn't even know, how could you get outside and away from his wickedness? How could you hope ever to be welcomed into time immemorial?

As she meditated on her apparently insoluble problem, she heard some one approaching down the path on her left hand. It was Mr. Townley. He had evidently taken this short-cut from the Tube station, on his way to visit her father, as he often did after office hours. She noticed that he looked all screwed up with thoughtfulness.

She stiffened as he drew close: she resented meeting him here at the Grange gates. But Mr. Townley did not seem aware of her feeling. He stopped, and greeted her with his friendly, puckered smile.

"Watching for the squirrel, Miss Juliet?"

It was going on for two years since he had come upon her in the same circumstances, and the length of his memory surprised her. But perhaps he had grace enough to be always haunted by thoughts of the squirrel. She turned away from him sulkily.

"If you and father did what you want," she said, "there'd be no squirrel to watch for."

Mr. Townley looked puzzled for a moment: then he laughed. "Oh, yes, that's the tragedy of it."

Juliet eyed him mistrustfully.

"What do you mean?" She was walking beside him now.

"Why, it's a sad business, having to cut up a fine old place like this."

"Why do you have to?"

"Well, Miss Juliet, your father didn't buy it for the sake of looking at it over his garden wall. And we've got to try to get something out of it meanwhile, till circumstances permit of our making it a paying concern."

"I don't see what you mean, exactly."

"You hardly would: I shouldn't worry about that. Anyhow," he added ruefully, "you've got one feather in your cap.—You were right as rain about the old lady not yielding on the question of the covenant."

"Of course she wouldn't," said Juliet scornfully. "Why was father so silly as to buy the Grange? It only seems to bother him."

"He was taking a long view," said Mr. Townley gravely. "And it might have been justified—may be still. But I'm afraid he regrets it rather, in the light of recent events."

"What events?"

"The passing of that poisonous Land Act. Of course, *you* know all about it?" His tone was gently bantering.

"No, I don't. What is it?"

"Well, it's something very worrying for people in your father's line. Sort of makes 'em not know where they are. Your father, of course, can hold his own, whatever happens, better than smaller men could; but it's bound to bother him, and I doubt if he'd have risked even a temporary loss over this place if he'd known."

"Who did it?" Juliet asked, wondering if it might be Miss Tiverton (or some one acting for her).

"The Johnnies who do what they call govern us. I'll explain it to you, if you really like."

"No, you needn't. I'm very glad if it's something that's made father repent about buying the Grange."

"Come now, Miss Juliet, if you'll excuse me saying so, I don't think you ought to feel like that about your own father."

"Why, you said yourself—at least, I think you did—that he'd only bought it to cut it up, and that it would be a sad pity."

"Yes, but that's another way of looking at things. I wasn't speaking professionally then."

"Either a thing's right or it's wrong," Juliet argued. "If it's sad to cut up the Grange—and I think it would be most awfully wicked—then there's no way of looking at it that would make it right."

Mr. Townley glanced down at her with amusement.

"But business is business, Miss Juliet. You see, what's right in business may be wrong in sentiment, and the other way round."

Juliet frowned.

"I used to think you were rather a nice person underneath," she said. "But—there's too much business about you. It spoils you dreadfully."

Mr. Townley had slowed his pace, as if he was in no hurry to have the conversation stopped by their arrival at Ashtree Towers. Now he laughed with undisguised enjoyment.

"What would your father say if he heard you?"

"Oh, my father——" Juliet's tone was a refusal of that topic. "I don't care what he'd say. Why do you think so much about him?"

"Well, for one thing, I couldn't afford not to. Mr. Simpson employs me, you see."

"Would you do anything he told you?"

"It's more a case of me telling Mr. Simpson—advising him, that is. And I must advise him, you see, for his best interests."

"I think you're a very bad adviser. What you ought to do is to advise him to leave the Grange alone."

Even as she looked up to see the effect of this admonition, a twinkle discreetly extinguished itself under Mr. Townley's eyelid. But he answered her gravely.

"For your sake, Miss Juliet, I really wish I could. But there's another thing for you to think of. If your father hadn't acted all his life on business principles you wouldn't be so well off, would you? You wouldn't have that beautiful house to live in, nor——"

Juliet interrupted him.

"I don't think ours is a beautiful house at all. I used to think it was, but I don't now. I don't think new white paint is beautiful, or magenta satin cushions, or electric light, or flower-beds full of hyacinths one day and tulips the next. It's all so un-mysterious. You can see everything there is. I like houses and gardens where there's things you don't see—things you never may see. Oh, I can't explain!" She broke off on a note of despair. To her astonishment, Mr. Townley answered quietly:

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" she said.

He nodded. "You like old things, that have got a history shut up inside them."

"Yes, that's it," she answered eagerly. "Things that belong to time immemorial."

"So do I. But it's a taste I try to keep under."

"Why ever?"

"The same answer, Miss Juliet—business. If you're in business, you have to look at things with a business eye."

"But don't you see," Juliet almost pleaded, "how badly it makes any one behave, looking at things with a business eye? Those sticks, for instance, all over the Grange. I don't know what they're for, but they oughtn't to be there."

"Sticks?" said Mr. Townley. Then he burst out laughing. "Oh, you mean the staking-out. But it's only temporary and provisional, though I'm afraid I can't promise you there won't be worse to come."

She let that pass.

"Anyhow," she went on heatedly, "the sticks is only a small thing. Fancy father having that case against Miss Tiverton!"

"It was perhaps a mistake," said Mr. Townley.

"If he'd won it (only of course he couldn't have), he'd have got into her wilderness."

"That wouldn't have killed her, would it?"

"Of course not. Nothing would kill her. But——"

Mr. Townley grinned.

"Nothing, you mean, except *anno domini*?"

"I don't know what that is," said Juliet sullenly.

"But it won't."

He looked at her with humorous reproach.

"Don't speak in that prophetic tone," he implored.

"It gives one the creeps—makes one afraid your father's worst nightmare will come true. But *anno domini* can't fail."

"I've told you, I don't know what it means."

"Old age, Miss Juliet. Every one's got to die of that, haven't they, if something else don't do the trick?"

"Old age!" Juliet stared. "But Miss Tiverton——" She stopped short. Never had she questioned the permanence, the immutability, of Miss Tiverton, since the day when her father had said Miss Tiverton was too old to die. Mr. Townley's words struck her with a sudden chill. During the last two years some knowledge of actuality must have filtered through, piecemeal, unnoticed, imperceptibly indeed, into the chaos of her mind; and now it treacherously formed itself into a recognition that Mr. Townley's statement was, at least generally, true. But she would not, dared not, admit it.

"I s'pose every one has so far," she said.

"But you think your dear old neighbor is just the one exception in the world's history that's going to prove the rule? Upon my word, Miss Juliet, I believe your father and I, in our moments of depression, are more than half inclined to agree with you."

Only a few yards in front of them were the gates of Ashtree Towers. Juliet walked on in silence. As they stopped before the house, she happened to glance up, and saw one of Miss Tiverton's stars glimmering above Miss Tiverton's chimneys. She paused at the gate, which Mr. Townley held open for her.

"And if Miss Tiverton ever died," she said, in a small unsteady voice, "do you think you would be able to do everything you want?"

"Certainly we should."

"Wouldn't—wouldn't some one acting for her protect the Grange?"

"I think not. Your father would buy her place, you see, and have no one to consult but himself."

"My father—buy Miss Tiverton's!"

"Not much doubt of that."

"But don't—don't people sometimes give their things, when they've died, to some particular person?"

Yet even as she spoke, she felt that no hope lay there. To whom could Miss Tiverton give time immemorial? The carcass had died already . . .

"That's a very pertinent question," said Mr. Townley, impressed. "Very pertinent indeed. But as it happens, Miss Juliet, we've been able to satisfy ourselves about it. There's a lot of circumstances to consider, which I needn't trouble you with, though I'm sure you'd understand them; and taking it all together, the odds are just about a hundred to one that that place" (he jerked his head irreverently toward Miss Tiverton's) "will come on to the market when the present owner dies."

Juliet was not listening; she did not need conviction on the point she had raised. She still watched the trembling star.

"Yes, you would get it," she said quietly, as she went through the gate, "if Miss Tiverton ever died. But she won't—she mustn't—"

Mr. Townley turned upon her a curious deprecating look.

"I do wish, Miss Juliet, you weren't so mighty fond of gray squirrels."

"Gray squirrels!" she repeated, amazed at his stupidity. But then, as she marched before him into the house, the waking, growing, moving mind of her shot up a question that she could not answer. What really *was* that stupendous whole of which gray squirrels formed but an infinitesimal item?

As she crossed the first floor landing Mrs. Simpson, who was dressing for dinner, called her into her bedroom.

"So you're back?"

"I came back hours ago."

"I hope the car was punctual?"

"You needn't have sent it."

"Oh well, I shan't be able to every afternoon, of course. But I thought just the first day it would look more cared for. Has Mr. Townley arrived, I wonder?"

"Yes," said Juliet disdainfully.

Her mother sighed.

"I'm sure I hope they'll soon settle this business about the Grange. The bother I'm having to get money for Angela's trousseau! with your father making out that he's ruined. Well, what was it like at school? Who did you meet? I heard by chance to-day that Lady Hemingway's daughter is there. Did you come across her?"

"I don't know. What's her Christian name? I didn't hear their surnames."

Mrs. Simpson pondered.

"Dorothy, was it? No, Dorothea. Dorothea Hemingway."

"There was a girl called Dorothea."

"I hope you made friends with her? I do want you to make nice friends."

"She's not particularly nice. She called father an old beast. Of course, that's all right, only she'd no business to say it before me."

Mrs. Simpson had dropped her powder-puff, and was

looking aghast. "She said that! Lady Hemingway's daughter said that! Really, if it had been any one else, I should complain to Miss Calthrop. I'm not sure I shan't anyhow. After all, Sir John Hemingway's only a knight. I hope you made some opportunity to tell her who my people are?"

"I didn't tell her anything. Margaret shut her up."

"Who's Margaret?"

"Margaret Sadler. She lives near the heath."

Mrs. Simpson's face brightened.

"Why, I do believe that must be a daughter of the dramatist. A very distinguished man, John Sadler. Quite one of the sort of people Northmore is famous for. So you made friends with Margaret Sadler?"

"Yes. I asked her to tea."

"Is she coming?"

"I think she thought her mother wouldn't let her."

Mrs. Simpson knitted her brows.

"Of course, there ought really to be an exchange of calls between me and Mrs. Sadler."

"Then you'd better call on her."

Mrs. Simpson looked worried.

"Well, I have lived here the longest, and it is my place to call—in a way. But—Northmore isn't quite so neighborly as I'd hoped, and the heath's some distance off. Poor dear Olive would have known what I'd better do. I tell you what—I'll see some day if Miss Calthrop could bring us together. Anyway, you must get as friendly as you can with Margaret. I dare say when all's said and done she's much more cultured and thoroughbred than Dorothea Hemingway."

"She's nice," returned Juliet thoughtfully. "Very much nicer than we are."

CHAPTER XII

MARGARET SADLER fulfilled her promise of walks in "recess," though she could not take Juliet as her companion every day; for half the school adored her as fervently as the other half adored Miss Calthrop. Her *protégée* inevitably came in for a good many black looks from Margaret's adherents; but Juliet paid no more regard to these than to the rival claims upon her chosen friend. School, from the first morning, had meant Margaret to her; and it continued to mean Margaret. She was aware of not being liked; but the girls who disliked her—nearly all, except Margaret—were unnecessary to her, and therefore practically non-existent. So, on the days when Margaret was not available in recess, she wandered about the garden by herself, casting, it must be confessed, rather sulky glances at her mentor whenever she passed with another girl clinging to her arm. For it was preeminently as a mentor that she had established Margaret in the scheme of her existence. She did not "adore" her: she had no wish to bring her flowers, nor to hang on her arm, nor to tell her secrets. It never even occurred to her to be fond of Margaret. No doubt, in the end, she would be on very intimate terms with her; but only because open speech and dealing were essential conditions of getting from Margaret what she wanted.

Margaret evidently understood her business. Not a word in her talks with Juliet was wasted on trivialities. Very often, amid the general gossip of the school, she seemed a little bit aloof—superior to it all, though in a kindly way; and Juliet had often noticed a "shut-up" look in her face while she listened to the outpourings of some one who had insisted on walking with her in recess. But with Juliet she expanded as though she were in her true element—clearing up the wilderness of Juliet's mind, and

dropping in the seed of an ideal wherever she had the chance. She went to work methodically: with her, it was a case of one thing at a time. By the end of their second walk she had succeeded in giving her companion a hazy idea of what those school-books with marked pages were for; with the result that Juliet came to school next day having proudly learned something by heart—though, when the class met, it was almost impossible to persuade her mistress that she really had known it the night before. Next, Margaret tackled something that she called Juliet's "manner." This was more subtle, and more interesting, but very difficult to come to an understanding about.

"Imitate me!" Juliet finally suggested, in despair.

But Margaret didn't seem able to.

"Except when you're with me, it's nearly always either boorish or pert," she said gently. "And you talk so shrilly, whenever you condescend to talk at all. You know, dear, I don't mean to hurt your feelings; but I'm sure you want me to tell you things."

"Of course I do. P'raps I'd better try to talk more like Angela. Miss Anderson said she was very refined."

"Oh, I don't think I should try to talk in any particular way," said Margaret hurriedly.

"Well, but I *must* do something, if it's all wrong."

"Yes, but—I think you'd be beginning at the wrong end. Mother says that the way any one talks, and their manners altogether, are just the outcome of their characters."

"Then if any one talks with a Cockney accent——"

"Oh, I didn't mean accent! You—you don't—at least, *very* little. I meant *manner*. Mother says if manners go wrong it's always due to some defect of character."

"Then we'd better find out what's the matter with my character," said Juliet tranquilly.

Margaret was able to find out a good deal. To her watchful and discerning eye, Juliet's most innocent remarks were revealing. For instance, she became positively excited when Juliet happened to mention having

paid a visit "on the q. t." to Olive and the vet in Chalkfields.

"But, Juliet, when you're not allowed to!"

"That's why I did it on the q. t."

"But my dear child, don't you see that that's not honorable?"

"Not honorable? Well, I s'pose if you come to that it wasn't honorable helping Olive to elope. But, of course, I had to."

"Why 'had to'?"

"Well, it was a splendid thing Olive marrying the vet. He's a real man. Archie—the one before—wasn't: she found it out suddenly. And Olive always wanted realness more than anything. But father and mother were furious. Father cut her off without a penny. She didn't care, though. Don't you think it was splendid of her?"

"I—I don't know. Perhaps if they really loved each other. . . . But I think your other sister's marriage sounds more attractive."

"Mr. Lethbridge is all right. He's got grand relations, and that's what Angela wanted. But Olive says she had an awful job to pull it off for Angela, and now she doesn't expect she'll be invited to the wedding. Did you ever?"

"Oh, Juliet, you *mustn't* say 'Did you ever?!'"

"Miss Anderson used to. But, of course, I won't if you don't."

Margaret sighed deeply, and walked on for a few minutes without speaking. Her profile looked almost careworn.

Juliet broke the silence when it began to be uncomfortable.

"You know, Margaret, you talk and talk, and it's frightfully good of you, and I do try to understand—but it's rather like the bothers you get into with a map when you haven't been told which part's the water. I always feel there's something you know and I don't, but you think I do."

"Yes," said Margaret slowly, and with portentous gravity. "I see what you mean."

"Like that about father," Juliet went on, "the first morning I was here. I've puzzled over you saying I oughtn't to know how bad he is."

Margaret again relapsed into silence: she was evidently thinking deeply.

"I believe," she said at last, "I begin to see. . . . There is something you need that just telling won't give you. I—I do want to help you, Juliet, but we won't talk any more now. I want to ask mother something first . . ."

Juliet was invited to tea at the Sadlers on the following Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Simpson rejoiced immoderately.

"I really think," she declared, "I shall buy you a new frock, in spite of your having to have the bridesmaid's things so soon. You could do without something to soothe down your father. These new chemises, perhaps—just so that I could say we're economizing; and then I could get them later if you really need them."

But Juliet demurred.

"I'd rather go in my school dress. Margaret likes it better than my best clothes. She hasn't seen my cerise silk with the frills; but I told her about it, and she said she thought something very plain was nicer for my age."

"Did she?" answered Mrs. Simpson, with interest. "Well, if you recollect, Miss Calthrop said much the same thing. Of course, it's just a matter of taste. Anyhow, you must go in the car."

"No, I'll walk," said Juliet firmly.

"But, my dear girl! I do want you to make a good impression on the Sadlers. I don't want them to think we're just nobodies. And to have you walking all up there, in your plain school dress——"

"It's what Margaret would do. Her people have got a car, but Margaret never goes out in it by herself, except

it's a long way and her mother wouldn't like her to walk alone."

"Really?" said Mrs. Simpson. "Well, then, I shan't insist. But do be careful how you talk, Juliet. Be pleasant and interesting. You might tell Mrs. Sadler all about Angela, and ask her if she knows Gloucestershire, and if she's ever met your relations at Templewood House."

The house Margaret lived in was very old, and very small. It did not look, from the outside, as if it could comfortably contain more than one inhabitant. The lattice-paned windows were almost sunk in cushions of honeysuckle and Banksia rose: the front door was humble and unobtrusive. You approached it through a low gate, along a path between miniature lawns, very smooth and velvety. The lawns were intersected with well-kept beds containing monthly roses. Up here the air was very fresh, blowing straight across the heath; on your right hand, as you passed through the front garden, were wide and distant views.

But when Juliet had nervously followed the parlor-maid indoors, she received an impression of cool mellow space. The hall was larger than she would have expected, and furnished like a living-room, with deep chairs, an ottoman and tall pots of sweet-smelling flowers. A broad carved staircase led to the upper regions; and opposite to her, as she crossed the hall, was a glass-paneled door set open to a shady sun-flecked garden. The parlor-maid took her straight through this door; and she saw Margaret and her mother sitting on the lawn under a cedar. Between them was a table laid for tea.

Margaret got up at once and came to meet her, looking prettier than usual, in these surroundings, and more grown-up. She wore a blue cotton dress. The sunshine, scattered through dark cedar-boughs, drew golden tints from the thick brown hair which was drawn back loosely from her forehead and confined in a "cart-horse tail" plait, to mark the closing stage of school-girlhood. Juliet

noticed, too, perhaps for the first time, the comeliness of her figure, the mature and firm moldings of her face. Margaret at home seemed even more of a personality, in the physical sense, than she seemed at school; and not only in the physical sense. Her greeting to Juliet was friendly, modest, even a little shy; but also it had, to Juliet's acute perception, a faint touch of the regal. . . Margaret was welcoming her: Margaret, all sweetness and graciousness, wanted to make her feel at home; but it was as if Margaret knew half unconsciously that she was condescending to an outsider . . .

With Mrs. Sadler it was subtly different. Mrs. Sadler—slight, young-looking, pretty, and in manner perhaps more girlish than her daughter—was, nevertheless, so obviously regal that what you noticed in her was the astonishing absence of condescension. She smiled at her guest as if they had known each other all Juliet's life; and she didn't get up. Her not getting up seemed to be the result of a mutual understanding.

Margaret, when she had presented Juliet to her mother, became unwontedly tongue-tied; but Mrs. Sadler found plenty to say. She talked in a pleasant effortless way, and her voice had a pure ring in it which fascinated Juliet's ear. Nevertheless, Juliet felt desperately ill at ease. Mrs. Sadler asked her how she liked school, what were her favorite studies, whether she enjoyed the games; and Juliet could only answer in jerky monosyllables. While she listened to Mrs. Sadler, and endeavored to make suitable replies, she was wondering why it should all be so much more difficult than it had ever been with any one—even with Miss Calthrop. Indeed, it had never been difficult with Miss Calthrop: she rather enjoyed talking in her presence when she had the chance, although she knew that Miss Calthrop disapproved of her. There was no sign that Margaret's mother disapproved of her; yet she found herself all but dumb.

"I hear that your sister is soon going to be married," Mrs. Sadler remarked, perseveringly.

“Yes,” said Juliet.

“Mr. Lethbridge is a delightful man, I’m told. We don’t go to St. Mary’s—it’s rather far; but I hear his preaching is excellent. Are you pleased at the idea of having a new brother?”

“He’s all right,” Juliet answered. She was not much interested in Angela’s marriage: she would have had more to say about Olive and the vet. But for some occult reason she was afraid to mention them to Mrs. Sadler. She looked sidewise at Margaret; and Margaret’s face had an almost obstinate lack of expression. Suddenly Mrs. Sadler laughed.

“Margaret told me about your other sister’s bad behavior! I’m afraid you’re not so shocked as you ought to be.”

Juliet was nonplussed. What did Mrs. Sadler really think? What did Mrs. Sadler expect her to say?

“Of course,” she stammered, “it was rather a low marriage.”

And then she flushed, in shame and confusion; not so much because she had spoken disloyally and insincerely as because she felt sure Mrs. Sadler would know that she had.

But her hostess seemed unaware of any crisis in the conversation.

“Oh, well,” she said, “at least your eldest sister’s choice is unexceptionable. I’ve heard a good deal about the Lethbridges from a friend of mine who lives near them in Gloucestershire—Lady Maud Templewood.” She paused a moment; then added, with a rather queer look at Juliet: “I believe your mother is a sort of connection of hers?”

“Yes, she is. Mother’s father’s grandfather was Earl Templewood. A belted earl he was.”

They laughed: but something besides laughter quivered across the atmosphere. Later, thinking it over, Juliet wondered if Margaret and her mother had exchanged glances.

“How imposing it sounds, doesn’t it?” said Mrs. Sadler lightly. “Lady Maud tells me she thinks of coming up for your sister’s wedding.”

“Does she?” Juliet exclaimed, her eyes round with astonishment. “Of course, mother’s been asking her to come and see us for years and years, but we never thought she would.”

“She’s getting old, and I dare say she finds it difficult to tear herself away from home. Tell us about your bridesmaid’s frock.”

Juliet began a punctilious description of that marvelously elaborate confection, striving not to omit a single detail. About half-way through she noticed a far-away look in Mrs. Sadler’s eyes; and suddenly, just as she was explaining the exact position of the rose-bud festoons, Margaret said to her mother:

“Shall I tell them to bring tea, or shall we wait for daddy and Bruce?”

Mrs. Sadler roused herself with a little jerk.

“Oh, let’s have it at once,” she replied. Then she turned more fully to Juliet, smiled, and said:

“Yes, dear, it sounds very *chic*. And your hat?”

But Juliet was chilled, and she faltered in her description of the hat. If Mrs. Sadler hadn’t really wanted to know about her clothes, why did she ask? Wistfully, her eyes followed Margaret’s stately, well-poised figure, as it retreated into the house. Coming to Margaret’s home had made her feel farther away from Margaret.

Her friend returned, and tea was brought out. After a moment Margaret said:

“Here they are.”

Juliet raised her eyes from the cup in which she had been carefully stirring sugar. Margaret’s father and brother were approaching over the lawn. The man had on a gray suit—lighter than Mr. Townley’s, and differently cut. Though his hair was silvered, his face in the distance looked young; but as he drew nearer, it showed a certain haggardness. He wore pince-nez, too, and his tall figure stooped a little. Nevertheless, the first impression of his youthfulness—an almost radiant youthfulness—persisted in Juliet as he came up to them. His dark eyes shone

behind the pince-nez; and his thin lips curved into a smile of spontaneous friendliness.

The son, in tennis flannels, was a much more formidable person. He would be about nineteen, Juliet supposed. He was very good-looking, in a rather obvious way; and he carried himself with the dignity of middle age. His handshake was not genial like his father's, but gravely ceremonious, and it seemed to convey a question—albeit a very civil and tolerant one—as to Juliet's right to exist. His politeness was devastating. He offered her cakes in a way that made her afraid to eat them. But when he had done his duty by her for the moment, and established himself in a hammock chair with a large cup of tea on the grass beside him and the cake-stand within his reach, he seemed suddenly more human. During the next few minutes the family talked together, mainly about a tennis tournament for which Bruce had been practising on a friend's court.

Then Mrs. Sadler brought Juliet back into notice.

"Yours is a nice garden, I expect. Are you lucky enough to have a tennis-court! We unfortunately haven't. Bruce and Margaret regret it a good deal, I'm afraid."

"Yes, we've got one," Juliet said. And something told her that she ought to make an effort to say more than that. "Bruce and Margaret could come and play on our court if you would allow them," she added.

And the moment she had said it she noticed again that curious "tingly" feeling in the atmosphere.

"How kind," answered Mrs. Sadler in a shallow voice. "But they really get all they want, at one place and another."

Even while she was speaking, Margaret's father had jerked his chair a little closer to Juliet's.

"What part of Northmore do you live in?" he asked. "Come, you're eating nothing. Have one of these sugar things. I'm not allowed to eat them, myself, but on Saturdays I do."

Juliet took the "sugar thing": he handed it in a way that was not frightening.

"I live near the Grange," she said. Somehow she liked saying that better than Ashtree Avenue.

"Oh, the Grange! Yes, I know where that is. A fine old place, I should think. But I hear there's a terrible lot of vandalism going on round there."

"John!" Mrs. Sadler broke in. "Did you remember to have your letters posted?"

"My dear, I did. You've a very poor opinion of my memory."

"But you know, daddy, you do forget things most dreadfully," Margaret said, with agitated emphasis.

Mr. Sadler turned to Juliet.

"Do you dare to attack your father like that?"

"Please, what is vandalism?" Juliet asked him.

"Oh, I meant that the speculating builder is running amuck in that part of Northmore, confound him! I'm very much afraid the Grange itself is threatened."

"Yes, it is," said Juliet; "but not so bad as it might be. There can't be a street of houses. I know, because it's my father who's running amuck."

You had to be honest with Margaret's father; but Juliet, as she said it, had a sense of flinging all the fat into the fire. Mr. Sadler would never smile at her again if he happened to know any one who knew Miss Tiverton.

A delicate flush had overspread his countenance: his glance shot appealingly from his wife to Margaret, and came back, troubled, to Juliet.

"Well, then, I offer you a thousand apologies."

"After all," remarked Mrs. Sadler, with no hint of embarrassment, "there must be houses for people to live in. We can't expect to have the whole of Northmore as a stage-setting for our own little snuggerly."

Juliet had not been hurt by Mr. Sadler's *faux pas*; and if she had been, his apology would have made everything more than right; indeed, some very obscure part of her being had closed upon it, as a thing to cherish and wonder about. But Mrs. Sadler's tact did hurt her, though she had no inkling as to why it should.

Margaret, meanwhile, had been fiddling with tea-cups on the tray; but Bruce was looking straight at her, from the remoteness of his low-set chair. And now suddenly he addressed her.

“Has Margaret shown you her menagerie?”

Juliet shook her head.

“Well, then”—Bruce heaved himself out of his chair—“if you’ve finished tea, let’s go and have a look at it. Come along, Megs.”

“Yes, certainly. May we go, mother?”

Mrs. Sadler nodded; and Juliet found herself wondering whether such polite formalities came naturally to Margaret, or whether she had had to learn them.

Margaret’s menagerie consisted of some half-dozen handsome rabbits and a guinea-pig. They were kept in spick-and-span hutches under a wall near the back door. Juliet was impressed by the neatness and propriety of all their appointments.

“Who looks after them for you?” she inquired.

“Oh, I do it myself. Bruce very kindly helps me.”

“Not with the guinea-pig,” said Bruce firmly. “The guinea-pig’s a weakness and an indiscretion. It hasn’t my blessing.”

Margaret had taken the “indiscretion” from its hay, and was fondling it in her hands. Its sand-colored coat showed up well against her blue dress.

“I think Bruce likes him really,” she remarked. “Daddy loves him. He likes to have Sandy run about his study while he’s writing.”

“Eccentricities of genius!” scoffed Bruce. “But *these* beasts are really worth while—pure-bred Angoras. If Margaret would take them seriously, and breed them scientifically, she could make money out of their clippings.”

“You know I’d love to, Bruce. But my school-work would suffer dreadfully if I gave more time to them than I do. And I don’t see how we could house very many more without encroaching on the garden. Besides, it would mean a big outlay at first.”

(How reasonable Margaret was! How ready to submit to circumstances!)

"It sounds awfully exciting," Juliet said, "to breed them for earning money. I know I should want to if they were mine. Are they sure to have babies as often as you want?"

Margaret's face put on its "shut-up" look: Bruce laughed.

"There's a good many things to consider," he said. "Angora mothers can't always bring up their whole brood. You want to get some more plebeian kind of rabbit littering at the same time: then you——"

Margaret interrupted. "I don't think Juliet would be interested in that part," she said.

"Oh, but I am!" Juliet cried. "I do want to hear about it."

Margaret thereupon gave her a look which plainly said: "Then you shouldn't."

When Bruce had drifted away from them, she put her arm through Juliet's and led her back into the garden.

"You see," she said in an explanatory tone, "those scientific subjects are more for boys and men. Bruce forgot for a moment; but he's awfully good about taking the least hint."

"I see," said Juliet, who might have been listening to Greek. But she wished that Bruce didn't take hints so easily, since Margaret's hint had deprived them of his company; and, now that the first terror was over, she liked Bruce. . . .

She wondered how she should know when they expected her to leave. After a while conversation with Margaret flagged. The inexhaustible topic of Juliet's shortcomings had not come up to-day; and Juliet, in any case, overwhelmed as she was with new impressions, had no great inclination to talk. She really wanted to go home and think; and was only grateful when, after half-an-hour's aimless strolling, Margaret said shyly:

"I've got some lessons to prepare for Monday, so do you think we'd better come indoors now for you to say good-by to mother?"

Mrs. Sadler was in the drawing-room—a dark, low-ceilinged room, brightened by gay chintzes and innumerable flowers. Bruce was playing the piano, while his mother listened—occasionally putting a stitch into some embroidery on a small hand-frame she held. Margaret's father was sitting in a lounge-chair just outside the open window, tranquilly smoking his pipe. His head appeared above the sill.

"Very well played, Bruce," he remarked, at the close of a movement during the last bars of which Margaret, holding her guest's arm, had waited respectfully on the threshold. Then Juliet, in response to a permissive touch, went straight to Mrs. Sadler and held out her hand.

"Thank you for having me," she said.

Mrs. Sadler, without rising, held her hand for a moment, and smiled graciously.

"I'm glad you could come."

Now that she was going, Juliet didn't want to go. The scene in that restful fragrant drawing-room moved her strangely; and Bruce's music still echoed in some deep place where tears have their source. . . .

"May I," she said, with a mighty effort, "ever come again?"

"As often as you like!"—John Sadler had turned his head, and was smiling in upon them through the window.

His words filled the second's interval in which she might have noticed hesitation on the part of her hostess.

"Of course," said Mrs. Sadler evenly. "Margaret will gladly invite you some day again."

John Sadler nodded his farewells; and she turned to Bruce, uncertain whether she ought to shake hands with him. The difficulty melted away, however, as he strode to the door and held it open for her. Margaret, before she had left the room, was already seated on the Chesterfield by Mrs. Sadler, delicately examining the embroidery; but

Bruce accompanied her to the door, and down the front garden as far as the gate. Then there seemed no question about its being right to shake hands with him.

"I did like your playing," Juliet said.

He blushed.

"Oh, did you? I'm rather keen on strumming, but I don't suppose I should keep it up if the family didn't encourage me."

"Margaret's awfully lucky to have you for a brother."

Bruce looked uncomfortable.

"Have you got any brothers?"

"One. But——" She stopped: the full content of that "but" was beyond her powers of expression. "Oh, I'm so glad," she burst out, "that they say I can come here again."

"But why ever not?"

"I don't know. . . . I had a sort of feeling. . . . You see, it's all frightfully different in my home."

"All homes are different. I expect yours is all right."

"No, I'm almost sure it's not. I see now why Margaret's so nice. I think p'raps that's why she asked me—so I should see."

"There are different ways of being nice!" said Bruce, with amusement.

"Are there? But I'm afraid my family doesn't know any of them . . ."

"Bruce!" It was Margaret, calling from one of the front windows. "Daddy wants you to get out the hose. Good-by again, Juliet. I hope you'll find your way back safely."

Juliet walked home very slowly. She assumed that she had spent at the Sadlers' an exceptionally happy and an epoch-making afternoon. She had been kindly received among "nice" people, one of whom she regarded as her special friend: she had been told she might go again. Yet she was bringing away with her a bruised, sorrowful feeling, which did not seem to be accounted for merely by

the contrast between the Sadlers and her own family. That contrast she had expected—foreknown: it had been implicit in Margaret. Perhaps the trouble really was that whereas she had looked forward to her introduction to Margaret's home as a step up toward the dim but alluring goal of her desire, she now seemed to find herself, in consequence of it, on a lower level than before. Yes, that was how she felt—pushed down. But who could possibly have done the pushing? Not Mr. Sadler, in spite of his remark about her father; and not Bruce. Margaret, then, or her mother? But that was absurd. Margaret wanted to help her; and she guessed that Margaret had enlisted her mother's sympathy; for there had been something she had said she must ask her mother, and the only apparent result of their talk was the invitation to tea. No, it must be her own fault, Juliet decided: she hadn't been pushed down: she was down, and all Margaret's patient efforts had failed so far to pull her the least little bit up. After all, when she came to think of it, she must be pretty hopeless. She had made a lot of mistakes that very afternoon: she felt that they were mistakes, though she didn't know why. Asking Margaret and Bruce to tea; telling about grandfather's grandfather; wanting to hear how you managed in breeding the Angoras; and—above all, perhaps—that remark about Olive's marriage. It had gone against the grain with her to say what she did; but still she had felt sure that it was what Mrs. Sadler expected—yet had known, as she said it, that it was all wrong. If only she could grasp the "why" in these matters! Funnily enough, the more Margaret tried to educate her, the more empty and ignorant she felt herself becoming. Probably she had always been empty and ignorant; but she had never *felt* like that till Margaret took her in hand. There had always seemed to be things in her mind—very confused and untidy, no doubt, without any particular beginning or end, but still rather fascinating to explore. Now whenever she turned to it for anything whatever, she found that Margaret had rooted up that thing, either leaving a blank, or

planting in its stead something queer and prickly, or putting up a notice: "Please keep to the paths."

Sometimes, however, you didn't find notices where they ought to have been, and where some day they would be: then you stumbled ingloriously into pitfalls that had surely never existed before. It was rather depressing, this not knowing your way about your own mind; yet she was certain that, if Margaret were allowed to work unhampered, the wilderness would blossom at last on a perfectly-ordered plan. And perhaps, meanwhile, if she studied the Sadler family more and more closely she would begin to see in advance what the plan was like. For the present she must make herself realize that all her old landmarks of conduct were treacherous, and all her old thinkings a mere entanglement among weeds.

On reaching home, she did not go up-stairs to report herself. Her mother could wait a little for the news about Cousin Maud, which would seem to her the main item of interest in connection with Juliet's visit. She slipped out through the passage door into the narrow garden that led to the summer-house.

The garden was full of thick fog and a particularly odious smell. She groped her way to the summer-house, wondering whether it had caught fire. Then the fog thinned a little, and she saw her father stooping under the wall lower down, near the place where the cat used to sit. He was stoking a bonfire—with what fuel, she could not imagine: sticks and herbage wouldn't smell like this. The wind was southerly: columns and columns of foul smoke were dispersing themselves over Miss Tiverton's garden.

Her father drew himself upright: his clumsy figure looked colossal in the smoke-laden atmosphere. His great red hands were clasped behind his back: his shoulders heaved as if with the labored breath of exhaustion: his mouth was open, the thick lower lip sagging. He appeared to Juliet as some grotesque, prehistoric monster: she felt creepy, half expecting to see dense yellow smoke-clouds and

dull red flame belch forth from that gaping mouth. After a moment his figure writhed, with a suggestion of ghoulis satisfaction: he shot out a heavily-booted foot, and stirred the bonfire so that it crackled excitedly. The smoke, rising with renewed impetus, once more hid him from her view. Then she saw him stooping again, groping, snatching things up, flinging them on to the blazing heap, jerking himself backward as the greedy flame spurted toward him. . . . And now he had finally lost all semblance of a man, or of any reasonable being. Juliet watched him. Cracked—Olive had said. Olive must be right. Glumness, violent temper, even a glinting eye, would not have proved it. But this hour of his enjoyment surely did. For he was enjoying himself, with a dreadful, idiotic enjoyment. It was as if you could see his soul clapping its podgy hands over the triumph of having befouled Miss Tiverton's garden.

Her mother's voice called from an upper window.

"I think you must stop your gardening now, dear. It's time to dress. The car's ordered at seven."

"Coming!" he called back, with unwonted cheerfulness.

"Is Juliet home? I want to hear how she got on at the Sadlers."

"Can't say. Haven't seen her."

Juliet moved into a corner, so that he should not see her.

"Dear me! Can they have kept her to supper, I wonder?"

"Can't say. Can't say at all."

Mr. Simpson hovered tenderly over his bonfire, patting it, poking it, feeding it with one last morsel—like a mother trying to tear herself away from a spoiled child.

"Do be quick, dear."

"Yes, yes, coming. Just let me stoke this up a bit first. Better to keep it smoldering. There may be some more stuff wants burning to-morrow."

Half an hour later Mrs. Simpson and Angela drifted

out on to the lawn, in flimsy attire, with opera cloaks thrown loosely across their shoulders. They were dining at a restaurant, and going on to a theater.

Juliet, her mind's eye still haunted by Mrs. Sadler and Margaret, seemed to see them from a new angle. She had always, as a matter of course, admired her mother; but now Mrs. Simpson's appearance gave rise to question. It couldn't be that she was dressed wrong: nearly all her time and thought and money went to her clothes. Juliet tried, for the purpose of comparison, to remember what sort of things Mrs. Sadler had worn; but she couldn't conjure up even the vaguest picture of Mrs. Sadler's clothes: nothing had remained with her but a certainty that they were beautiful and right. It couldn't be, either, that her mother wasn't very pretty: her prettiness flashed at you all the time. Of course, you knew that it consisted to a great extent in the artificial coloring of hair and complexion; but there it was—sheer prettiness, however produced. Then had the defect got anything to do with her mother's shape? Mrs. Sadler, if you had tried to draw her, would have baffled you, perhaps with her slender lines and delicate curves eluding you among draperies. But Mrs. Simpson would have been easy: in fact, she was very much the shape of what you did draw, in the margins of your exercise-books, when you were thinking about something else. You knew that what you drew was wrong: the neck was always too thick, the head had a stuck-on look as if it could never turn, the legs and arms were apt to be too short, the chest bulged. You were invariably disappointed when you looked critically at what you had produced; and invariably comforted by its anatomical likeness to Mrs. Simpson. That, then, must be it—her mother's shape.

And Angela? Angela might be a fool: indeed, Juliet had long since come to the conclusion that she was. But it had always been a tenable theory that if lovely, floating, sighing, misty Angela were indeed a fool, then to be a fool was something of an esthetic achievement. Even to

the most unsympathetic view, it would be obvious that Angela's brand of folly did no harm. . . . But this evening Juliet felt queerly repelled by Angela; not so sure that she was harmless. As she watched the thistledown figure moving over the grass without any obvious means of locomotion, she seemed to see that Angela, all her life, had been drifting in search of something upon which to "settle"; moreover, that whatever she did eventually settle on would be choked and tickled and worried past bearing; and that the chosen objective would never be able to escape, even if it saw her bearing down upon it, because, however often it brushed her off, she would always come circling and drifting confidently back. . . . In this moment of detached vision, Juliet was panic-stricken lest Angela should ever try to settle on *her*; and when the two appeared at the end of the grass-way leading up to the summer-house, she instinctively drew farther into her retreat. Then a snatch of their conversation brought her back to realities, and the uncanny fear for herself gave place to reasonable pity for another.

"I can't think why Roy wouldn't come to-night," Angela said plaintively.

"You know, dear, clergymen have a sort of superstition about Saturday evenings."

"But that's *absurd*, mother. One never stays at home on a Saturday evening. I don't know what I *shall* do if he goes on like that after we're married."

"I don't suppose he will, dear. I don't think it's at all likely. He'll want to get away from those dreadful docks."

"Of course you know, mother, about the docks——"

They vanished round the house again, reappearing a few minutes later.

"We shall be terribly late," Angela said. "What's father doing?"

"Getting dressed, dear. I won't hurry him, I don't think. He's in such a beautiful temper this evening, and it would be a pity to upset him. I haven't seen him in

such good spirits since the Grange began to go wrong. Gardening soothes him wonderfully."

The car came round, and Juliet heard the bustle of departure over the wall behind her. Suddenly her father shouted for Leslie.

"Hallo!" Leslie answered from the schoolroom window, which overlooked the drive.

"I want you to see after that bonfire."

"Right-o, dad. I'll keep it going."

"It wants stoking pretty frequently."

"Right-o. I'll do it every half-hour or so till you come back."

"But, Leslie dear, you mustn't sit up for us." (That was Mrs. Simpson.) "It wouldn't do, with you working so hard for your exams."

"Well, anyhow, I shan't be turning in till about half past nine, and I'll give it a good stoking before I do."

"That's it," said Mr. Simpson; and the car drove off.

It occurred to Juliet that if she stayed where she was she would escape the ordeal of supper with Leslie. As a rule, now, he dined down-stairs; but to-night, as the rest of the family were out, his meal would be laid with hers in the schoolroom. Nobody knew she had come home, and nobody would bother if she hadn't . . .

She had often noticed how Leslie knew things which couldn't, by any ordinary means, be known; but none the less she was surprised when, within five minutes of the others' departure, he came straight to the summer-house as though he had been sure of finding her.

"Look here, Owl-eyes," he began, "I want you to be useful and obliging for once."

Juliet did not answer immediately: she was mentally comparing Leslie with Bruce, and deciding that Leslie, though quite as handsome as Bruce if you took them feature by feature, looked rather like a grocer's assistant in his "Sunday best"—except for his loose ungainly limbs and shifty glances, which reminded you more of a puppy, and a whipped one at that.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked coldly, remembering the former occasion on which he had enlisted her services.

Leslie sat down on the bench, and wriggled his person close up to hers.

"It's like this. . . . I know you're always game. Jolly good it was, the way you stuck by Olive."

Juliet stared. "Why, but you told tales about things you'd found out! You got me into a row."

"Never!" cried Leslie. "Who said that? I may have guessed a thing or two, but anything I ever let drop was intended to put them off the scent."

Juliet knew that he was lying. She was not shocked: she merely noted, in silence, that he had great need of her.

"When they come back," said Leslie, close to her ear, "I shall be in bed—officially. The mater *may* look in, and there'll be a lump in the bed, with the bedclothes pulled all over it, and she wouldn't dare disturb me when I'm as sound asleep as that. But the trouble is, I haven't got a latch-key."

It was an immense relief that after all he would not be at home to stoke the bonfire: she warmed to him in unusual friendliness.

"How late shall you be?"

He fingered the place which some day a mustache would adorn.

"Well, a fellow never knows how long he may get kept. But that makes no difference to you, kid. All you've got to do is to keep awake till they come back, and then, when you're sure the old man's done fussing round and got safe to bed, you just sneak down and unlock the back door. That all right?"

"Yes. I can do it easily."

Leslie got up, and his eyes rested on her with a cunning gleam.

"Any little thing *you* want done, count on me," he said. "I might lend a hand now and then with your secret visits to Olive—eh?"

So he knew about that, too. She looked after him with a kind of awe as he retreated, ambling and jaunty, down the path.

Five minutes later she heard him leave the house, and her blessing followed him. She neither knew nor cared whither he was going: enough that he went, and that the others had gone; that she was alone as she never could be when any one of them was anywhere on the premises. She had scarcely realized her craving for solitude till this moment of its satisfaction; but it must have been strong, since now there came flooding upon her an indescribable sense of refreshment and freedom. All the troubles, the anxieties, the confusions, the questionings, which of late had chafed and baffled her, fell away the instant she found herself truly alone with the cool beauty of the June evening. But their falling away seemed a preparation for something vague that she desired, or that desired her, and that now trembled near, and nearer, till it was only a little way out of her reach. . . . She did not know at first what it was; but she felt that she would know if she sat on, very quietly, letting the breeze play on her forehead; watching the blue of the lupins grow metallic, and the white of the roses grow mysteriously luminous, in the creeping summer dusk; listening to the night-chatter of the birds in Miss Tiverton's trees, that darkened steadily against a molten-gold sky.

A scent of stocks. . . . But there were no stocks in the garden: they must be Miss Tiverton's. And the mysterious something touched her, urgently, secretly. It had come floating on the breath of the stocks. Then, instantly, before she could catch it, it was frightened away—by a dreadful stench from the smoldering bonfire.

Juliet sprang up in a fury of understanding. It was time immemorial—troubled, desecrated, feeling round for a possible avenger. It had touched her, and fled from her, identifying her with the stench of the bonfire.

She ran down the path, and, like a maniac, set to work

to undo all that her father, like a maniac, had done; seized a stick, separated, beat out, and stamped upon the live fuel, careless of sparks that burned and blistered her hands; fetched water, soused the disintegrated heap again and yet again. Panting and disheveled, she stood looking upon the clogged black ashes from which no slenderest thread of smoke was rising now; and became conscious of a primitive overwhelming joy in existence that had never visited her before; conscious of being just Juliet; conscious of liberation from a long stultifying thralldom to her family. But still she was not satisfied. She glanced about her restlessly, searching for more of the Simpson handiwork, that she might destroy it. Her gaze lighted on the top of the wall. She went to the toolshed for an empty tub, turned it upside down under the wall, jumped on to it, and with her bare hands began pulling at the shards of glass. She kept on being cut; but somehow she gloried in being cut. Surely the cat would be watching: surely Miss Tiverton's ash tree nodded and whispered approvingly: surely there was a glimmer of movement behind that long straight window which used to open when Olive sang? Some of the glass was firmly fixed, but she worried and tugged at it, piece by piece, rejoicing in the tinkling thumps with which it fell to earth on the Simpson side of the wall. She had cleared a space big enough for the cat to sit, even to stretch, on: she got down, moved the tub, and extended the area of her operations. . . . At last she was too tired to reach up any more, and her hands were all smarting and numb. Moreover, it was dark. She climbed to the ground, and drew some big breaths, tossing back the hair from her hot damp forehead. If only the cat would come. . . . If only she might know that they were reconciled. But nothing came—not even a breath from the stocks. Her elation died down a little: she carried back the tub, and crept indoors, up-stairs to her room, to wash her begrimed, blistered, blood-smearred hands.

Once in her room, she felt that she had been away from it for an eternity. The little things on her dressing-table

reminded her of getting ready to go to the Sadlers, which seemed immeasurably long ago. As she poured out cold water and plunged her hands in it, she thought, unwillingly, of Margaret. . . . She was certain that she had done good acts to-night: but how puzzling it was to think of them in connection with Margaret. They *were* good acts: she tingled with the knowledge of it; yet Margaret would be shocked. Margaret would say you should not destroy your father's bonfires, nor pull off the glass he had had put on a wall.

With these thoughts of Margaret, all the new-found, joyful simplicity went out of existence. It was the old difficulty of lacking a clue; of not knowing exactly what pattern it was that you were being remade into.

Juliet, her damaged hands fondling each other, drew to the open window and looked out wistfully toward Miss Tiverton's. If only there had been a response from over the wall! She would have accepted Miss Tiverton's opinion, or the cat's, even before Margaret's. . . .

But how silent it was over there—how indifferent, how death-like. Not even the whisper of a breeze; not the trembling of a leaf against the sky, lit dimly by a low-hanging, sultry moon; not a wisp of smoke hovering round the chimneys; not a ray stealing from any window; not the faintest sound or stir of movement. . . . The fearful question flashed into her mind: had she been too late? Had the fumes of the bonfire choked out a life that could not, according to Mr. Townley, last forever? Had that mysterious breath that touched her and fled from her been the flickering-out of time immemorial? But it could not—it could not go like that. If it did, she would never know the meaning of anything; never be able to answer the bird when it sang to her: "Don't you know it? Don't you know it? Don't you know it?" And there would be no bird—only the red-brick ruin her father had made. And if she traveled all over the world she would never again see a sunset window glance at her with benediction and promise. . . . There would be no need to refashion her-

self, for there would be no mystery to penetrate and possess; no mystery anywhere at all; nothing to make it worth while not being a Simpson . . .

But gradually, as she gazed upon the trees and the chimneys and the sky between, she grew more and more certain that beneath the utter stillness, the utter silence, a pulse throbbed. It was the world, the real world, that lay within that circle of trees. It contained the moon, what stars there were, and the whole of space. There was nothing to be seen or imagined beyond it. . . . And the moon, hanging tranquilly upside down, did not seem in the least perturbed: nor did the stars—they blinked serenely. And in the trees, no doubt, there were innumerable eyes—eyes of birds, eyes of squirrels, all blinking sleepily like the stars. And somewhere or other, calmly watching, would be the great moon eyes of the cat. No, it was not death: it was Miss Tiverton asleep, with her guardians awake. It was time immemorial, confident, immovable, with the moon and the stars all gathered into its embrace . . .

A scent of stocks drifted on to the night. It was very faint, but it lingered: there was nothing now to drive it away. Juliet leaned out toward it: her heart swelled. She knew that she would never tell Margaret about this, nor about anything to do with time immemorial. She knew—but on a much deeper level of consciousness, where perhaps inconsistencies are reconciled—that time immemorial would always be in some sort a refuge from Margaret.

Soon after midnight she stole down-stairs and unlocked the back door. Again she thought of Margaret, but without dismay. It wasn't a "nice" thing to do, and you couldn't imagine Margaret doing it for Bruce. But then, Bruce wouldn't want it done. Bruce was "nice"—Leslie wasn't: so there you were. Didn't that (she reflected as she noiselessly climbed the stairs again) explain a good deal of the confusion when you came to look into it? Margaret expected you to say and think and act just as you would

if you belonged to a nice family. How was that possible? The most you could manage was to undo the crimes of your family whenever you had the chance; and, otherwise, to wash your hands of it (as far as you could without downright disobligness) and become nice yourself.

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS a very hot Saturday in mid-July, four days before Angela's wedding. Juliet, silently enduring the discomfort of a starched cotton frock, sat on the edge of a "settee" in the living-room of the veterinary surgeon's house. Chalkfields was hotter and stuffier than Ashtree Avenue; and this room had a plushy, eucalyptusy smell which Ashtree Towers hadn't. Also, looking at Olive or the vet made you feel the heat still more acutely.

Olive declared it was cooler indoors, with the sun-blinds down: the vet thought otherwise, and was fast asleep in his shirt-sleeves on two chairs outside, under the branches of a meager and jaded sycamore, with his hat pulled over his eyes, and a variety of dogs and eats—six in all—asleep on, under and around him. Sometimes he thrust up his large capable hand, and convulsively brushed away some of the sticky blight with which the sycamore kept gently bedewing him.

Olive lounged with utter *abandon* in a repp-covered chair. Her hair, which, before her marriage, she used to dress in a manner betokening some sort of slap-dash ideal, straggled in lank, spiritless strands across her forehead and over her ears. She wore a shapeless white blouse, untidily open at the neck; an equally shapeless tweed skirt; and a Holland apron bestrewn with hairs of animals she had been tending. Whether it were due to the heat, or merely to her marriage with the vet, all the "style" had undoubtedly departed from Olive. There had always been a certain definiteness in her physique, a certain "go" in the very contour of her large unbeautiful face. But now, from head to foot, she looked limp and slurred. The only thing unchanged about her was the shrewdness of her dark eyes, when, now and again, they blinked away their sleepiness; the only improvement, an air of good-natured, lazy tolerance which you felt to be ineradicable. There was really

nothing to make Juliet ill at ease with her, except the knowledge that this would probably be her last visit to Chalkfields, and that, if she said so, Olive would guess her reasons, and despise her. But she had seen more clearly, after going to the Sadlers, that Margaret was right about its not being "the thing" to do; and she might not have been here now but for a long-standing promise to keep Olive "posted up" in news of Angela's affairs. Besides, there was something she wanted to ask Olive—something she couldn't ask anybody else.

"Well?" Olive said, after a silence, "how's our worthy sire? A sunbeam in the home, as usual?"

"Pretty bad, on and off. He says he's ruined."

"Dear me! More ruined than usual?"

"I'm not quite sure. I only know from hearing him and Mr. Townley talk."

Olive settled herself as luxuriously as possible among the rather stiff cushions.

"Tell me all about it."

"Well, one night about a month ago" (Juliet spoke very gravely) "he made a bonfire, as if—as if he was mad. It was to annoy Miss Tiverton. It had a most disgusting smell. When they were at the theater I put it out."

"Very brave and bold of you. I suppose you got into a nice row?"

"No. He thought next day that the ogre—Miss Tiverton's gardener—had done it; and something else I did. He didn't think I was at home, you see. He was dreadfully mad about it all. Next evening he was going to make the bonfire again, only mother begged him to go to church and hand the bag round as usual. Monday night, he started on it as soon as he got back from London; only then Mr. Townley came along. Mr. Townley comes a lot now. They sat on the terrace, and Mr. Townley tried to make father look at some papers he'd got—something to do with a building on the Grange; but father was in one of his moods and didn't seem to take any interest. Then, suddenly, he broke out awfully excited and said he'd rather be ruined

outright than own himself beaten by the old she-devil, who was bound to go to her own place before long—and then he'd build flats and a cinema and a public house all at once on her grave. Very mad, he was. And Mr. Townley got up to go, and said—very well, he'd leave the papers and plans for father to look over. And then father walked to the place where the bonfire had been, and kicked up the ashes, and shook his fist at the wall. And then mother came out and asked him whether there should be the Blue Hungarian or the White Viennese band, because Whiteley's wanted to know. And he roared at her, with his face all swollen and beet root color, that there shouldn't be any band, or any wedding either, because he was ruined, didn't she understand? Absolutely ruined."

Olive's grin had been steadily widening.

"So I suppose Angela's trousseau's been docked?"

"No, I don't think so. Next day he was quite different—smiling and joking, and ever so happy. He actually told mother he was writing to Miss Calthrop to say she might have the use of the Grange field till further notice; and as I was a pupil, he didn't propose to charge her any rent to speak of."

Olive looked puzzled.

"What did he do that for?"

"I wondered at first. Angela said, wasn't it rather a mistake? Because the girls would make such a noise playing games right under our garden wall, though of course it wouldn't hurt *her* after she was married and gone. Father said yes, of course, they would make a terrible lot of noise, but he and mother liked to hear young things enjoying themselves, so it wouldn't hurt *them*. His eyes had their funny glint when he said that, and I knew he'd done it to annoy Miss Tiverton, because the Grange field comes right up to her wilderness."

Olive sniggered.

"And the band? Is there to be one after all?"

"Yes—and what do you think? Although he's ruined, there's been a thing built on the lawn—sort of summer-

house and bandstand in one. He had it done in a frightful hurry, and it's fearfully ugly, and spoils the lawn for tennis. The band's to sit in it, and afterward it's to be a summer-house."

"What's the idea of that?"

"Oh, don't you *see*?" Juliet clasped her hands round her knees, and threw up a furtive glance at her sister. She was ashamed—almost too much ashamed to explain.

"No, I don't see any method whatever in that madness."

"It's so that he can look into Miss Tiverton's garden." Olive raised her eyebrows.

"The old boy does seem a bit dotty," she remarked. "I'm afraid you and mother are in for a bad time, kiddy."

Juliet fidgeted, and kept silence a while. "Cousin Maud's coming to the wedding," she said at last.

"No, *is* she? Wonders 'll never cease. Depend on it, that's because she thinks it would be awkward having disowned us always, when Angela's received among the Lethbridges."

"She's bringing Roy's sister—who wouldn't be bridesmaid, you know. They're going to stay at the Sadlers'."

"Isn't mother waxy about that? She'd have loved to put them up."

"No, she doesn't mind. She thinks it'll be a way of her getting to know Mrs. Sadler—quicker than through me being friends with Margaret. Olive, I want to ask you something."

"Fire away."

"What could I do to make Cousin Maud like me—sort of take to me, you know?"

"Why shouldn't she?"

"Well, she might—she might mix me up with the rest of you. I mean"—Juliet blushed and stammered—"with mother and father and Angela."

Olive had looked at her sharply.

"Certainly she won't mix you up with *me*, as we're not invited! What are you getting at, kiddy?"

It was rather difficult to go on now that Olive's eyes were awake.

"I want"—Juliet said, writhing amid her starched folds, and tingling with heat—"I want Cousin Maud to think me nice."

"Do you mean"—Olive spoke roughly—"do you mean you're going, at your tender age, to try your hand at that beastly shamming, like mother and Angela?"

"No," answered Juliet, flushing painfully, "it's not shamming. I told you once I'd never be a sham. I want realness just as much as you did. I want to *be* nice—not just pretend to be. I'm getting nice. Margaret's teaching me, and she says I've improved a lot already. I don't stare so, or talk so loud, or use so many vulgar expressions; and I know better what things not to talk about. But when I'm shy, I can't remember it all; and I'm afraid I may be shy with Cousin Maud. And I do most dreadfully want her to like me."

A variety of expressions had flitted across Olive's face: they merged at last into a look of grave reflective inquiry.

"And what's at the bottom," she answered, not ungently, "of this sudden desire to worm yourself in with Cousin Maud?"

Juliet cast down her eyes, blushed again, wriggled and made a great effort.

"You see," she explained apologetically, "all Margaret's relations are nice; and when I'm at the Sadlers' (I've only been once, but I'm to go again), I feel—oh, it's frightfully difficult to put it—but I feel that Margaret and her mother are thinking all the time what mine are like; and perhaps they'd ask me oftener, and let Margaret come to tea with me, if I wasn't Juliet Simpson. So I thought if Cousin Maud took a fancy to me they might begin thinking of me as Cousin Maud's cousin."

Olive was leaning right back, and gazing at her young sister through half-closed eyelids. So she remained, silent, for two or three minutes.

“Would you be able to understand, kiddy, if I told you that by just so far as the Sadlers make you feel like that they’re not worth bothering about?”

“They *are* worth it!” Juliet cried. “They’re most frightfully worth it! If I hadn’t known Margaret, I don’t s’pose I should ever have had a chance, even, to get outside it all at home.”

“To learn to be a ‘lidy,’ in fact,” said Olive flippantly, “with no mistake about it. Well, my infant, I’m sure I don’t know how you’re to make the running with Cousin Maud. I suppose it’s too late for you to get out of that preposterous bridesmaid’s frock, which’ll give her fits to start with. You’d better wear it with an air of conscious martyrdom, and supply her with as many ices as she can eat, and remember to take the plate from her each time, and tell her how much you love Margaret, and ask her if she can give you the name of the calceolarias, and whether she manages to grow them at Templewood House.”

Juliet looked dissatisfied.

“Olive, you’re angry with me.”

“No, not exactly. A bit sorry, perhaps. And I still don’t altogether understand. Cousin Maud is to be a stepping-stone to the Sadlers. But why this passion for the Sadlers and their particular form of ‘niceness’? Are you?”—Olive flashed open her eyes—“are you precociously in love with the Sadler boy?”

“Olive, how horrible of you! I’m *not!*”

There was genuine feeling in that: Juliet’s face had grown stormy.

Olive laughed a little.

“Sorry, kiddy. I oughtn’t to put such ideas into your innocent head. Well, then, I suppose you won’t tell me what it really is.”

Juliet, clenching her hands, began to think hard. She wasn’t sure that she could tell what “it” was—sure even that she knew. In any case, she would have made no attempt to tell Olive if she had not remembered that this would probably be their last meeting for ages.

“Olive, I’ll see if I can explain . . .” A pause. Then: “You see, I hate father. Margaret says I oughtn’t to, but I don’t think she knows exactly why I do. It’s not because of anything particular about him—his tempers, or his swear-words, or what he looks like, or even his being cracked. It’s—it’s because of what happens because of him. There’s something—something beautiful, somewhere—something tremendously worth while, that lasts forever and ever. I don’t know what it is—at least, perhaps I’ve got a name for it myself, but I couldn’t make any one else understand. And if you’re not nice, like father isn’t, you drive it away, or it runs away from you.”

“Whatever it is you may happen to mean, I don’t think it would run away from you, kiddy.”

“Yes, it would. It does. Except when I’m doing something to show I hate father. And you can’t always find anything to do. And when you can’t, you feel all sucked under and muddy and without anything to breathe. So I want to stop being the least, teeniest little bit a Simpson, except the name, and then some day I shall marry some one nice and get rid of that.”

“Then what exactly do you want to be instead? A Sadler?” And Olive ostentatiously bit her lip, and looked slyly apologetic, as if she deprecated having repeated an indiscretion.

But Juliet, her brows drawn together, the eyes beneath them concentrated on something very far away, did not notice any occasion for taking offense.

“Only nice,” she said. “The sort of person”—she hesitated, and finished hurriedly, with a little catch in her breath—“the sort of person Miss Tiverton would call on, if she ever went out . . .”

“Miss Tiverton!” Olive gasped. “But what’s the child thinking of? Miss Tiverton’s nobody—that I ever heard—except a cross-grained, probably bed-ridden, old maid.”

Juliet returned her stare, but did not answer. With grave, deep-seeing, pitiful eyes, she was measuring the all but immeasurable distance between Olive and realness—

that realness which, for all her desire, she had failed to achieve with Archie, and now, apparently, with the vet.

The course of the long hot afternoon had been punctuated by the screech of the telephone bell, followed by declarations from a maid-of-all-work, parrot-like in the monotony of their wording and tone, that the master was out but would be back by five certain. Both screech and response must have penetrated every time to the pocket-handkerchief garden; but they did not disturb the vet's slumber. The tea-gong, however, did. At the very first sound of it, his recumbent figure heaved and stretched, scattering the dogs and cats. He sat up, blinking genially, yawned, mopped his forehead with a colored handkerchief and struggled into a black alpaca coat. Wearing a sleepy contented smile, he joined Olive and Juliet at a spread table in the dining-waiting-consulting room. The maid-of-all-work, not yet fully dressed (if she ever would be), followed him in.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Parker rung up to say her cat got fits, an' then Mrs. Sonnenschein to say her dog terrible worried with the mange, an' Miss Piper to say both her kittens in convulsions, an' Lady Fitzbillington to know if Dulcibel's temperratshure's down yet, an' Miss Baggs to know if she shall send the car for Percival, an' Miss Evangeline Baggs, cousin of the other what lives in Chalkfields Square, to say 'er parrot got a pearl button stuck in 'is crop an' rapidly chokin' to death."

"Right," said the vet. Very thoughtfully he surveyed one by one the piled contents of the plates. It was really rather difficult, as Juliet also found, to know what to have. There were several kinds of cake, two kinds of jam, marmalade, lettuces, radishes, and bloater-paste. The only thing certain was that you were expected to eat, and would eat, a very great deal. Juliet's young appetite did not fail her; but she ate with an uncomfortable sense of guilt. Tea at the Sadlers' was not in the least like this, even on Saturdays. You got enough—at least, you did if Margaret's

father were looking after you; but you got it in such a different way. At the Sadlers' people ate between talking: here you talked (not very distinctly) while you were eating. If you happened to think that this form of meal was the pleasanter, it merely showed a defect in your character.

The vet had fallen in Juliet's estimation. He had been falling gradually ever since she had known Margaret. It was curious how different he seemed nowadays from the dashing giant-hero who had dared to penetrate Miss Tiverton's, and had carried off Olive secretly in a car. There was nothing heroic about him in black alpaca, jovially munching bread and bloater-paste. She wondered whether that slovenly maid-of-all-work had dared to include Miss Tiverton's cat in a long list of animals requiring immediate attention while the vet was asleep; and whether he had merely answered with an all-inclusive "Right."

The bloater-paste was certainly very nice, especially with radishes, of which the vet had just dumped a handful on her plate. But it stood for something all wrong. It must be under the cumulative influence of bloater-paste and radishes, eaten in an over-warm, over-furnished, doggy-smelling room, that Olive said such things about Miss Tiverton. Really, in some ways, she had been better in the Archie period: then at least she had been able to sing: "Oh! that we two . . ." in a voice that made Miss Tiverton have her window opened.

Juliet went from bloater-paste to jam, from jam to cake, with growing disapproval.

When that long last tea was finished the vet offered to "drive her round a bit," if she wouldn't mind waiting at the houses he had to go to, and to drop her finally at the corner of Ashtree Avenue. Juliet shook her head, explaining that she couldn't risk meeting her mother, who might be out calling in the car: if they chanced to meet as she walked home, she could say she had been down to the shops.

The vet shook his head and said, "Teh—Teh——"

Olive said, laughing: "Would Margaret think that quite nice?"

"No," answered Juliet reflectively, "I don't think she would. But when you do some things, you have to do other things as well, whether you want to or not."

The vet was suddenly in a hurry, though he had shown no signs of it during tea. Olive got his hat and gloves, and stood on the threshold of the open front door while he brought round his car. Then she went down the steps, handed him his appurtenances, and offered her cheek to be kissed. Juliet, standing just inside the door, could hear the kiss. . . .

"Harry, you won't have to be late, will you? Remember you were up all last night."

He shrugged his huge shoulders and made a grimace.

"I'll kill or cure 'em as quick as I can," he promised. "Good-by, my pet."

"Good-by, old thing." When Olive said that, there throbbed in her voice one of those deep notes which moved you in her singing. She stayed at the bottom of the steps while her husband started up the engine, and as he drove off, moved out on to the pavement, gazed after him, blew another kiss. . . .

Then she came back briskly, mounting the steps two at a time.

"Well, kiddy, are you going to stay a bit and keep me company?"

"I think I'd better go now," Juliet answered.

"Then we shan't meet again till after the great event. You'll manage to nip off next Saturday all right?"

"I—I'm not sure."

"Not sure? Why? Anything happening?"

"No, but I—I think p'raps——" Her courage failed her: she flushed miserably. Olive, with a single swift glance, searched out her very soul; then laughed in perfect good humor.

"Very well. Good-by for the present." She bent suddenly, and, for the first time in Juliet's memory, kissed her. "I hope your Margaret—and Cousin Maud!—will help you to find whatever rum thing you're after, you

queer little fish. But I'm very much afraid, all the same, that you're on the wrong tack."

Juliet descended the long flight of steps slowly, with a mist across her eyes, and trouble in her heart. She hadn't liked saying good-by to Olive, when it came to the point. For the first time she questioned Margaret's dictum: "Not honorable," Margaret had said—because, if known about, it wouldn't be allowed. That argument, with Juliet, missed aim completely: she simply couldn't understand it; and had an impulse, which kept her hesitating at the gate, to run back and tell Olive she would go on coming as usual. Then she thought of the bloater-paste, the warm doggy smell, the neck of Olive's blouse, Harry's kiss that you could hear; and simultaneously, of Margaret in her cool blue dress; of Mrs. Sadler's embroidery, of the fragrant June dusk in the Sadlers' drawing-room, of Bruce's music. . . . And she was sure that Margaret must be right; that, honorable or not (whatever 'honorable' might mean), the thing wasn't nice; and that Margaret wouldn't have been so decided about it—would at any rate have consulted her mother—had it been a question of stolen visits to Angela and Mr. Lethbridge.

What could Olive have meant about being "on the wrong tack"? Olive, too, had a way of being right. But she also had—or had lately acquired—a way of being stupendously wrong. "Miss Tiverton's nothing, except a cross-grained, probably bed-ridden old maid." Of course, Olive had always hated Miss Tiverton, and been Simpsonish about her; but a remark of that kind showed—well, it showed that bloater-paste had simply clogged up her soul. Juliet stepped out more cheerfully along the glaring pavement—not so sorry about having said good-by.

And then a sound caught her up, held her back: the sound of a rich, powerful, tender voice—longing, appealing, yet with a strange, paradoxical under-throb of triumph:

“Oh! that we two were maying . . .”

What a sound to hear in a hot stuffy street in Chalkfields! What a sound to come through the smudged window of a frowsy living-room where the plush sofa was covered with hairs of dogs. . . . It was a sound that belonged to time immemorial—time immemorial not only desired, but won . . .

How *dared* Olive?

CHAPTER XIV

ANGELA'S wedding-day was one of those days when life is not a narrative but a pageant; not a sequence of events, but a series of impressions, for the most part superficial in their beginning, but sinking, some of them, so deep into your being that only time will enable you to gage their ultimate value.

There was Angela, drifting up the nave on her father's arm, in a church that smelled curiously of new varnish, Madonna lilies, and the red felt that covers hassocks. It was a church that for the time had ceased to be a church: perhaps it objected to being waked up on a week-day in the early afternoon. At all events, the July sunshine poured through its clear glass windows on to a strange emptiness, and this despite the fact that the building was fuller than at ordinary service-times, and heavily decorated withal.

There was Mr. Simpson, looking as if he conferred an honor on the church by being in it—just as he looked on Sundays when he carried up the bag.

There were the people, rows and rows of them, edging up, and rising on tiptoe, and craning forward, to see Angela as she drifted; and sometimes whispering together. They were neither friendly to Angela, nor hostile: they were intensely inquisitive.

Near the front on the left-hand side, just behind Mrs. Simpson, were Cousin Maud (not at all smart), and a slender girl in gray. Impossible to say how you knew they were Cousin Maud and Roy's sister: it must have had to do with the way they held their backs. These backs were neither friendly nor hostile nor inquisitive: they were simply patient.

At the chancel step there was Roy Lethbridge, with a friend. Even though you had seen him in this church more often than anywhere else, yet to-day he seemed out of place in it. In church, without cassock and surplice, standing awkwardly by the chancel step instead of in his stall or at the lectern, he looked as if he felt himself to be out of place. He looked other things, too—stern, burdened, aloof and incredibly older. He looked like some one determined not to dodge or flinch when it happened—when the fluffy white thing came drifting up to him, to settle . . .

It was very difficult not to turn your head and look at Cousin Maud when, as chief bridesmaid, you stopped just in front of her; and it was very uncomfortable to have Cousin Maud looking at you, because her look had an extraordinary, penetrating quality and made tingles down your back. However firmly you had convinced yourself, before the mirror, that Olive's description of the bridesmaid's frock as "preposterous" was due to sourness at not being invited to Angela's wedding, the whole question could not but reopen itself under this unseen but tormenting gaze of Cousin Maud.

There was Angela, turning to hand you her gloves and flowers, with a set smile and eyes foggier than ever.

There was the drive back to Ashtree Towers, with three other bridesmaids, in a closed car, your bouquet held primly in your lap; and the strange spectacle of ordinary unconcerned people going about their business—people to whom the day was just Wednesday.

There was Ashtree Towers, all unreal with awning, red carpet and banks of flowers; two long tables in the garden, with waiters behind them; people pouring in and pouring in—a steady stream making first for Angela and her bridegroom, then for the tables. There was a deafening chatter, a ceaseless clink of plates and spoons and glasses, a blazing sun from which you could find no shelter. Then suddenly

the band, up there in that high wooden structure, broke out with a clash that made you jump violently.

The people were mainly of one type—the women dressed conspicuously, and given to shrill laughter; the men correct, heavy, hot, and usually bow-windowed, with expressions of rather silly good nature that you felt were put on for the occasion. Mrs. Simpson had adopted a special and very magnificent manner that somehow made the flaws in her shape more noticeable. Mr. Simpson, redder than ever, thanks to his best clothes and the heat, moved among his guests benignly but ponderously, and always with a hint of preoccupation that added to his general impressiveness. Leslie, his hair plastered down, and his buttonhole adorned with a white gardenia, ambled among the giggling bridesmaids. Mr. Townley (spoiled by a deferential smirk) handed things and relieved people of their plates.

Angela was under the ash tree. There was not a breath of wind, so it couldn't throw anything down on to her wreathed and veiled head: but it looked sulky. So did the trees in Miss Tiverton's. The calceolarias, on the other hand, looked smugly pleased. A white butterfly wandered by mistake into the wedding party, then floated disdainfully away to the hot sleepy solitudes of the Grange field. Sometimes, when the band played low, you caught the flurried twitter of a bird . . .

Again Juliet saw her father, swelling visibly with importance; and her mother, holding her head as if it were a crown that might tumble off. Really, it seemed that they were justified; that, for the moment at least, Simpsons were at the center of the universe.

Three figures stood apart from the crowd—not, indeed, all together, in the physical sense, but obviously fellow-strangers in this triumphant world of the Simpsons. One

was Roy Lethbridge. Stationed by Angela, he too smiled, as every one smiled; but only with his lips. His eyes were impenetrable. People spoke to him, but never more than a few words. It was as if his personality threw out an atmosphere in which they could not comfortably linger. A defensive atmosphere, Juliet thought.

Another was Roy's sister. Many times had Mrs. Simpson majestically borne down upon her, taken possession of her, introduced her (and her natural history) to other guests; but always the gentle-mannered, quiet-eyed girl had slipped back at the first opportunity to Cousin Maud.

It was Cousin Maud who completed the trio. She was old and frumpishly dressed; but she was quite as regal as Mrs. Sadler. She looked completely incapable of emotion. She was neither at home here nor ill at ease; neither approving nor critical. She seemed to regard herself primarily as a refuge for Roy's sister; but she was not standoffish. She refused (by more subtle means than words) to be dislodged from her garden-chair by Mrs. Simpson; but she had a gracious, if somewhat vapid, remark for any one whom Mrs. Simpson presented to her. And she watched everything with reflective interest; but chiefly Angela and Roy.

It happened at last that Juliet was standing near her, sometimes glancing wistfully at Roy's sister, whose face she liked, whose sadness aroused her sympathy. For Roy's sister was unmistakably sad; if not always, at any rate to-day. Neither she nor Cousin Maud had said anything to Juliet except "How do you do?" And Juliet, for her part, found that she could not make the advances she had planned. She was paralyzed by her consciousness of being a Simpson. Her bridesmaid's frock was a badge of the Simpson world—a world so predominant, so powerful, that there seemed less chance than ever of escaping from it.

She envied the two members of the spiritually-detached trio who would, very speedily, escape: she even, a little,

envied the third, who, though captive in the clutches of the Simpsons, could never really be one with them.

It was surely a bad sign that they had caught Roy. If they could encroach on Cousin Maud's world and snatch something out of it, at least they were not futile. They were to be reckoned with—as her father affirmed by his very gait. And other encroachments seemed fearfully possible. The high bandstand, overlooking Miss Tiverton's garden, was no longer a mere crazy impertinence: it was a challenge. And the noise issuing from it had already subdued every faintest sound of time immemorial.

Something caught and transfixed her gaze. Away over there on the wall (which her father, in his excitement about the bandstand, had left clear of glass), rose in solemn majesty the figure of the cat. It did not sit down: it merely stood and looked—its eyes, in the sunshine, two steady glows of amber. For three seconds, perhaps, it stood there; then the band blared out at it in frenzy: it turned, and vanished with a flick of its tail.

Juliet looked after it, quivering with excitement, tingling with discomfiture. She knew that it had seen everything, including her bridesmaid's frock; but it had never made any reassuring sign that it recognized her as the remover of the glass.

The party surged about her, deafening her, using up the air, penning her in.

She had forgotten the existence of Cousin Maud, when a gruff but carrying voice compelled her attention. She looked round, almost irritably. Cousin Maud made a gesture, not unlike that with which one entices a potentially sociable dog. Juliet, perforce, drew a little nearer to her.

“Angela's sister, aren't you?”

Juliet nodded: there was unfortunately no denying it.

“You look rather woebegone for a bridesmaid.”

“It's so hot and squashy and noisy.”

“I agree with all that. Weddings generally are.”

“Not so bad as this,” said Juliet bitterly.

Two pairs of eyes studied her—Cousin Maud’s shrewdly, the Lethbridge girl’s with a remote and guarded interest.

The band was surpassing itself over the most popular valse-tune of the hour. A garishly-dressed girl to whom Leslie was talking beat time with her foot, then, giggling, blushing and grimacing, bent to his arm and danced a few turns, apologizing profusely to the people she bumped into.

A maid came out of the house on to the terrace, looked around her, threaded her way to Mr. Simpson, spoke to him, followed him indoors. Two or three minutes later he reappeared and went straight to the bandstand. The music stopped abruptly.

Mr. Simpson made for Angela, who was cutting the cake, spoke a word to her and came back to mingle with the throng. His face had a curious expression of ill-suppressed glee. He rubbed his hands together, then put them firmly behind him; then rubbed them again, as if he couldn’t help it. He peered about, evidently in search of some one. People were glancing at him, and at the bandmen putting up their instruments: a few tried to detain him with questions, but he gave only brief answers, which Juliet could not hear. Finally, he caught sight of Mr. Townley, plucked him by the sleeve, and drew him apart from the crowd. The hand-rubbing broke out with renewed vigor. Mr. Townley seemed eagerly interested. Both men kept looking in the direction of Miss Tiverton’s.

A sense of foreboding came heavily upon Juliet. Cousin Maud was still talking to her, but she couldn’t really attend.

“What’s happened to the band?” Cousin Maud inquired.

“I don’t know. Shall I go and find out?”

“By all means. I’m devoured with curiosity.”

Juliet edged nearer to her father and Mr. Townley. It was some minutes before they parted: when they did, she hurried to Mr. Townley with her breathless question.

"What is it? What's happened?"

"Some one's just been in to say that the old lady next door has had a stroke, and absolute quiet is essential."

"A—stroke? What is a stroke?"

"Ask me another!" said Mr. Townley. "But it's serious, you see."

"Do you mean—it's something you die of?"

"You may or you mayn't. Some people say the third one kills you. We don't know how many the old lady's had before. Just like her annoying little ways, isn't it, to cast a gloom over the party?"

Juliet slowly turned away from him.

"It doesn't seem," she threw at him, with a backward glance, "to have cast a gloom over father—or you."

She was utterly nonplussed. She didn't know how to think about the tremendous thing that had happened; but it was clear that she must escape from the party before she could begin to think at all. She was elbowing her way through it when Cousin Maud caught at her arm and stopped her.

"Why, what is it, child? Not a tragedy, I hope?"

"I—I don't know," Juliet said, chafing under the detaining hand. "It may be. Miss Tiverton's had a stroke."

"But who is Miss Tiverton? A guest?"

"Oh, no! She lives over there. She's tremendously old."

Juliet, in her agitation, kept shuffling from one foot to the other: Cousin Maud, still eyeing her, let go her arm.

"And a great friend?"

"No. We don't know her. But it was her cat came just now."

"Well, my dear, it's nice of you to take it so much to heart. But sometimes people recover even from strokes."

"You can't tell. . . . Every one does die, some time. But I think"—into Juliet's unsteady voice came a faint throb of exultation—"I think most likely she only did it to stop the band."

PART THREE

MIRAGE

CHAPTER XV

ONE evening, in the midsummer of the year nineteen hundred and seventeen, two girls were resting in the beech-woods that sloped up at the back of Lord Templewood's house—now temporarily converted into a hospital for officers. One of them, the elder, wore the uniform of a V.A.D. nurse; the other, a slender, long-limbed creature, with a colt-like mixture of ungainliness and grace, was dressed in a plain linen frock of ordinary cut. She had an air of restlessness even in her repose—fidgeting sometimes with the dark hair that was obviously unused to grown-up confinement, and glancing eagerly in all directions at once. But her restlessness held no element of discontent: you could have told instantly that it was the result of a stimulated vitality.

Below them lay the wide lawn of Templewood House, dotted over with long chairs and couches: between these moved now and then the figures of white-capped nurses, armed with trays or cushions, or supporting a crippled patient who was trying his feet. Farther off, where paths led away from the lawn into a sunny flower-garden, men would be strolling in couples, some of them aided by stick or crutch.

The eyes of the younger girl seemed to be ever and anon arrested, now by the scene spread out below her, now by some activity in the trees above her, now (when a far-away look stole into them) by something that hovered over and around and between and under it all. . . . Her small

mobile mouth kept smiling a little; but it was some time since she had made any remark to her companion.

The older girl—a person of gracious good looks and quietly confident manner—at last broke silence.

“Do you think you’ll be happy here, Juliet?”

“Oh, rather! Only I wish I’d been trained like you and the others.”

“Well, it would have been a pity for you to leave school before the time.”

“Would it? I don’t see what I got out of Miss Calthrop’s after you left.”

“I’m not going to pretend you got as much as you might have done!” Margaret said, with her gentle laugh. “You never could be made to realize your privilege.”

“Privilege?” Juliet repeated, with a slight grimace.

“Why yes, surely. It *was* a privilege, for us all, to be under a woman like Miss Calthrop.”

“I don’t think Miss Calthrop was any great shakes, myself,” said Juliet: and then she giggled because Margaret looked reproving. “All the same,” she added in a conciliatory tone, “I suppose it was quite decent of her to keep me. She didn’t think me at all ‘select,’ so I can’t imagine why she did. It must have been because father let her have the playing-field.”

“Not altogether, I think,” Margaret said, in the tone of one who knew.

Juliet looked interested.

“Why was it, then?”

“Oh, well——” Margaret’s manner was deprecating, and she did not attempt any real answer. But the two words had suggested a great deal to Juliet.

“Did *you* have anything to do with it, Megs?”

“What does it matter, after all this long time?”

“Only that I like to know. Things interest me.”

“Well, you and I were friends, you see. . . . Miss Calthrop knew that. Mother explained to her. But it’s such ancient history!”

Juliet’s glance had ceased wandering: she was sitting

up now, hugging her knees, and looking at the thing that couldn't be seen.

"It was awfully good of you and Mrs. Sadler to persuade her to keep me," she said in a rather small voice.

"Oh, I should quite have missed you." And again silence fell between them. Then Juliet put a question.

"Did you or Mrs. Sadler have anything to do with Cousin Maud asking me here?"

Margaret seemed a shade confused. "Why, but of course, Lady Maud is glad to have you. She likes you. She took quite a fancy to you at your sister's wedding."

"That's not answering, is it?" said Juliet, with a touch of impatience. "Cousin Maud never took any notice of me all the years between, and we thought she'd forgotten us again, till she wrote suddenly and asked me to come here and help. So I think somebody must have put it into her head."

"Well, if you really want to know, I talked to her a little about you," Margaret admitted, an affectionate smile replacing the momentary look of uneasiness. "It did seem so much the best thing that you should have something to do when you left school."

"Were you afraid I'd get into mischief?"

"I certainly thought," Margaret answered steadily, "that you might find yourself at a loose end. But I was right, wasn't I, Juliet? You did like coming?"

"Oh, of course." Juliet spoke absently. She was wondering why it should chafe her to find that she owed so much to Margaret: after all, hadn't she long ago placed herself in Margaret's hands, with a view to benefit? Convinced of unreasonableness, she threw off her grudging mood, leaned back against the beech-bole with her hands behind her head, and laughed happily.

"I expect I should have done something desperate if I'd stayed at home!"

"How are things at home?" Margaret asked, in what Juliet sometimes irreverently thought of as her "bedside" voice.

"Awful. Father simply isn't livable with nowadays. His affairs have been going pretty badly ever since the Land Act was passed, and the war sort of put the lid on. I believe we really are much poorer now, and mother says we ought to get rid of Ashtree Towers, and live in something much smaller (and more select!). But father won't. You see, he's got an ob—ob—oh, some one did tell me the word—obsession, that's it."

"What about?"

"About our next-door neighbor," said Juliet shortly.

"How do you mean, exactly?"

"He wants her place. He's always wanted it, and more than ever since he bought the Grange, because she's got power to stop him doing all he wants. But, of course, he can't get it till she dies. And she doesn't die. She had a stroke the day Angela was married, and father was wild with delight. But nothing more happened; so now he sits tight, waiting. I think he thinks the war must kill her in some way. He *can't* leave Ashtree Towers. He's not—not sane enough."

Margaret looked sincerely troubled.

"How old is your neighbor?"

Juliet shook her head.

"Don't know. Older than any one can imagine."

"Oh, well, of course, one must never wish for any one to die; but perhaps it wouldn't be altogether wrong to look forward to what must come soon . . ."

"Shut up!" said Juliet angrily. "You don't know anything about it."

Margaret flushed with rare anger; but her speech was, as always, controlled.

"Naturally, I don't know, except what you've told me. I was merely hoping that things might become better for you all."

"Not that way," Juliet said bitterly. Then she grew ashamed of herself, and turned to her friend with a shy gentle look. "You see, I couldn't stand things at home at all if it wasn't for Miss Tiverton."

“Oh—then you are friends with the old lady? But you never told me about her before.”

“I’ve never seen her in my life.”

“Then I don’t understand.”

“Of course you don’t. You couldn’t possibly.”

Margaret’s smile was the kind you put on when you are determined not to be hurt.

“I thought I knew all your secrets, Juliet.”

“Did you? Oh, good gracious, no!”

There was really nothing to be said to that. Margaret slightly compressed her lips. Then, meritoriously, she recovered her bright persuasive patience.

“But I’m your greatest friend?”

“I haven’t got any other girl friend.”

“Dear me! You’re not going to tell me you’ve begun having friends of the other sex?”

“No, not yet. I don’t know any men at all well, except Mr. Townley and Bruce. And I don’t think I much like Mr. Townley.”

A keen glance flashed out from under Margaret’s long lashes; then she laughed, kindly.

“What a funny little assortment! Well, my child, I’m glad you haven’t begun to think of lovers. Some day they’ll come along, I suspect.”

“One would do.”

Juliet suddenly withdrew into herself, not from any unfriendliness, but in obedience to an imperative demand from her surroundings. The country was new to her. Hitherto her life in a London suburb had never been broken save by August excursions to some popular watering place, where Nature was represented by a sea whose lapping and sighing became a mere undertone in the blare of bands, the chatter of crowds, the strident cackle of beach “concert-parties.” And yet, in a sense, the country was unexpectedly familiar: it was like an extension, a fulfillment, of Miss Tiverton’s: it was as if she found herself at the very threshold of that “beyondness” which had always lurked behind Miss Tiverton’s chimneys and between her

tree-tops. Yet still only the threshold; for still the feeling she had was a restless desire rather than a thrill of satisfaction. The wider her horizon became, the larger, the more urgent, was this desire. . . . The sun going down over there in that wide blue distance gave her an even bigger idea of time immemorial than when he had been just peeping in through Miss Tiverton's trees before he sank behind the houses. But he was the same sun—going perhaps now to say good night to Miss Tiverton. And many of the scents and sounds belonging to this beech-wood and the gardens below were the same as those that wandered forth sometimes from the confines of Miss Tiverton's quiet demesne—only more luscious, more insistent. Yet, it made her realize as never before the greatness and the splendor of that which Miss Tiverton guarded.

"Don't you know it? Don't you know it? Don't you know it?"

Juliet started. She might have been sitting under Miss Tiverton's wall! Nothing but that melodious, teasing, eternal question could so powerfully have clinched her sense that all this was one with Miss Tiverton's. . . . And nothing else could have brought the beyond so tormentingly near. For she thought she had come to the verge of knowing; but only the verge: really to know might still take a very, very long time.

The war was a nuisance. Not only had it made things even more unbearable at home, but it had taken Bruce away just as he was beginning to count. So suddenly he had gone—so completely. One minute (after a tennis set at the local club) he had been fanning her with a huge dock leaf, looking down at her with a rather nice kind of amusement in his critical eyes, and saying something quite silly in a tone that made it unforgettable; and the next, he had departed into inaccessible regions of thunder and fire and blood and glory—all very unreal and unimaginable, and made remoter than ever by the sighs and tremors and bated breath with which Margaret spoke of him thenceforth. Bruce, it seemed, was now only to be thought of as

a creature raised far above the ruck of mankind: away in those strange countries across the sea, he moved in a lurid glamour which somehow had the effect of magnifying his attractively normal person till he loomed gigantic—terrifically unapproachable. That is, if you chose to see with Margaret's eyes. But Juliet didn't always so choose: she had formed, and she kept her own idea of Bruce, which in some essential points differed from Margaret's. Not that she by any means denied him heroic qualities; but the heroism with which she herself invested him had no pomposity, no funereal tinge. It was light-hearted, casual, associated with laughter and with dreams—the sort of heroism that would lead you boldly into the fastnesses of time immemorial, and not let you be afraid even when you came to the utmost edge of the beyond. . . . But war had nothing to do with time immemorial. She couldn't understand war; couldn't see what all the fuss was about. There were wars in history, but they made very dull reading; and, anyway, they didn't seem to have upset people's daily routine like this one did. And such an awful lot of death there seemed to be—and wounding and crippling: it ought to be stopped. But she wasn't in the least afraid for Bruce, though she would have preferred that he should have been kept in England, as Leslie was, through some flaw in his physique. The people killed in wars, like those killed in earthquakes or railway accidents, were sure not to be people you ever had anything to do with.

At Miss Tiverton's they took no notice of the war. Her father, certainly, had tried to get Miss Tiverton into trouble for "hoarding," because he had seen some large bundles going down into her area after dusk; but it had turned out to be only cocoanut fiber for use in her conservatory. And the sunset, and the blue distance, and the things flying and moving and creeping and scuttling all among the trees and on the moss and over her ankles—none of these took any notice of the war. And Bruce wouldn't, if only he was here. He would just lounge beside her against the beech-trunk, nibbling blades of grass or

smoking a cigarette, and tease her about having put her hair up—but with a look of approval in his nice brown eyes . . .

“Isn’t the war a *beastly* nuisance?” she exclaimed.

“Juliet! Surely that isn’t how one thinks of it!”

“It’s how I do. Except that if there hadn’t been one I shouldn’t have come here. Yes, that’s true.”

“I should have hoped,” said Margaret restrainedly, “that that sight”—she indicated the garden, with its chairs and couches—“would have helped you to take a larger view.”

“Oh, I’m most awfully sorry for them, and all that; and I’m going to do my best to cheer them up. But I think if I’d been them I’d have refused to go and fight. Then there couldn’t have been a war.”

“My dear child, you don’t know what you’re saying. Even if you can’t see the bigger issue, don’t you at least realize that those men, and all the others, have been defending you from unspeakable horrors?”

“Defending me from unspeakable horrors! How frightfully exciting! What horrors?”

“Are you really as ignorant as you pretend? Have you never been told what it would be like if the Germans came?”

“No—no. Not much. Father says sometimes he doesn’t think things could very well be worse if they did.”

“Oh, I see. I suppose one can’t blame you for the atmosphere you’ve been brought up in. But perhaps, while you’re here, you’ll begin to think of it all differently. If not, I don’t know how you’re to put any heart into your work.”

“You can’t put an awful lot of heart into washing up and carrying trays—and that’s what I’m to do, chiefly. But p’raps I’ll be able to put some into cheering your patients. I shall have more time for that than you will.”

She linked her arm in Margaret’s as together they made their way down the steep hillside path. But Margaret was unresponsive.

“Anyhow,” she said at last, with a hint of bitterness, “you’ll find it easier to be cheerful than I do. It’s not as if you had a brother at the front.”

“Oh, don’t worry about Bruce,” Juliet answered. “He’ll be all right.”

There may have been a proprietary note in this assurance: at all events, Margaret, flushing, withdrew her arm.

“That’s quite easy to say, isn’t it?”

“But he will! Bruce isn’t a *bit* the sort of person to get killed.”

“It’s so funny, the way you always call him by his Christian name, when he’s years older than you, and you scarcely know him! Not than I mind.”

“He asked me to. I started that way, but then mother said I ought to say Mr. Bruce; and the first time I said it he roared with laughter and asked me if I could say ‘Plums, prunes and prisms.’ Then he said he gave me fair warning he was never going to call me anything but Juliet.”

Margaret, in silent dignity, climbed a stile at the bottom of the path.

“I don’t quite understand,” she said, when she was safely over. “You talk as if you’d seen such a lot of each other.”

“Not an awful lot. Only when I’ve been to tea with you, and at the tennis club, and now and then when he’s been taking me home. Just think—he’s never seen me with my hair up! I wonder if he’ll like it?”

“I can’t say,” Margaret answered more lightly. “I expect he’ll be sorry to find you’re not a child any more. Dear Bruce! He was always so kind and jolly with my school friends.”

CHAPTER XVI

THAT first day Juliet had found it all *couleur de rose*. Margaret had been given an hour or two of extra leisure for the purpose of helping her to "shake down": very few duties had been imposed upon her: Cousin Maud had been briefly gracious (Juliet was glad of the brevity): the ancient earl had had his wheeled chair stopped when he passed her in the garden, and had spoken to her with *empressement* and affection, mistaking her, as he mistook many people, for some Templewood belle of a bygone generation; and nearly all the members of the bustling, pre-occupied hospital staff had vouchsafed her a word of friendly welcome. Those of the patients whom she happened to come across had looked at her with evident interest, turning sometimes (as she noted in retreat) to ask a question about her from comrade or nurse. She had taken to bed with her the conviction that she was "in for" a jollier time than she had ever had before. Especially she looked forward to long idle hours in the beech-woods; and perhaps she wouldn't mind very much if, incidentally, she were to have "in tow" some good-looking convalescent officer who should remind her of Bruce. . . . She did mean to do her duty by the patients. Even if she hadn't got Margaret's rather churchy kind of patriotism, it was pleasant to be in the thick of things, like every one else. Funny, how life opened out. . . . Six months ago at Miss Calthrop's, she couldn't have imagined herself as enthusiastic war-worker. Was that a brown owl? How near it brought Miss Tiverton's! That was the best of it: the farther you got out, away from the Simpsons', the nearer you got to time immemorial. Fancy her being in bed at Cousin Maud's!

But next day it began to be slightly oppressive. Nobody took much notice of her, except to say that she ought to be somewhere else, or doing something she wasn't doing,

or not doing something that she was. The staff, which yesterday had impressed her as having a collective friendliness, now separated itself into individuals, of whom some were less pleasant than others; and the less pleasant ones appeared to have a kind of authority over her. She spent the first part of the morning in finding her way about the mazes of the kitchen regions, and the rest of it in trying to wash up. She didn't know much about washing-up. Jam spoons were a grave difficulty: was there really no way except sliding your thumb along the inside? Then, innumerable things had to be put on innumerable trays, and carried to all sorts of different places. Several other workers were engaged on this frenzied task, and she managed fairly well by copying what they did. A few of the patients had their lunch in the garden. It was a relief, after the heat and the stewy smell of the kitchens, to get out into the sunshine among the flowers, though the tray she carried was rather heavy, and its destination a long way off, in the shade of some cedar trees. She had her reward, too, in the form of an appreciative smile from a person with only one arm.

"You've taken a lot of trouble for me," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind. I liked bringing it. I s'pose you have it on this table. Who cuts it up for you?"

"Sister will blow along, I expect. But if you're not in a hurry, couldn't you stay till she does?"

"I don't know if I'm in a hurry or not—I mean, whether I ought to be. But there's an awful lot of them in there—I dare say they won't miss me."

"Whereas I should: so that seems settled, doesn't it?"

Juliet sat down on the grass.

"No, you mustn't," her new friend protested. "It rained in the night. Try the couch: I'll make my feet very small."

She obeyed, with a happy little gurgle of laughter.

"Rotten luck, you getting smashed up," she remarked.

"Y—yes. But there are two sides to it. I don't have to go back, you see."

"What is it like over there?" Juliet asked.

Her companion laughed.

"I don't think I'll try to describe it. Very different from lying in this garden, with a fairy in attendance."

"Oh—would you say I was like a fairy?"

"Like some kind of fairy. There are lots of different kinds, aren't there? Good fairies and mischievous ones, meadow-fairies and wood-fairies; fair fairies and dark fairies. The dark wood-fairies are the mischievous ones, I think. . . . Here comes one of the fair good brand."

Juliet glanced over her shoulder: a full-fledged nurse was approaching.

"But I like the mischievous ones quite as well," her friend whispered hurriedly.

The nurse looked at Juliet (who had forgotten to get up) very coldly indeed.

"Miss Simpson, the lunches are not all served yet. Surely they must be wanting you in the kitchen?"

"Yes, but your patient wanted me till you came," Juliet answered good-temperedly. "Here, take my seat."

"Thanks—I haven't time or inclination to sit about on the patients' couches. Now, Captain Stanley, I wonder if you can manage. Let's see what you've got."

"You *know* I can't manage, Sister," Juliet heard him say reproachfully, as she strolled away. "Not even if it is mince."

After going a little farther, she looked back: the good fairy wasn't sitting on the couch, certainly; but she was gratuitously feeding Captain Stanley with his mince.

Just then Lord Templewood's wheeled chair came round a corner. The old man's restless vacant eyes kindled at sight of her: he called to his attendant to stop.

"Griselda!" he said excitedly. "My dear Griselda! Where have you been hiding yourself all these months? Well, you're back in time for the ball. . . . You must wear roses—red roses. Come with me, and we'll gather them—the reddest we can find. To the rose-garden, quick!"

The attendant made a sign to Juliet: she knew it to mean that she was to take no notice. But that hidden hungry part of her—which, years ago, had opened, like a sundew, upon John Sadler's apology, drawn it down and away from the plane of the ephemeral—now again bestirred itself, feeling wistfully toward something on which it knew that it might feed. . . . Juliet turned, and walked beside the chair.

"Yes, please, *lots* of red roses," she said, in a voice that was strange to herself.

An extraordinary, dream-like sensation had begun to creep over her; or perhaps, indeed, it was more the sensation of having waked from a dream. That which had been the present, the actual, was slipping from her. . . . The couches dotted about under the trees were hallucinations which, as her vision grew clearer, would dissolve into nothingness. Very slowly, she passed Captain Stanley and the nurse who had said "Miss Simpson" in a tone that made the name an insult: they were hollow fantasies, devoid of significance; in a moment she would have blinked them away. . . . Juliet Simpson? What a relief it was to stop being anything so trivial, so harassed, so circumscribed as Juliet Simpson: to be, instead, Griselda—Griselda going to gather red roses for the ball. . . . She looked shyly, yet confidently, at the face of the man in the chair beside her. It was a very old face—wasted, and lined, and wan; but a very courtly one; and there was no failing in the eyes, which seemed, as they kept glancing up at her, to catch fire from the glow that she felt in her own . . .

She was conscious of a presence behind them—hostile and importunate: she even saw, in a sidewise glance, the stiff black figure pushing the chair. But it didn't matter very much: it wasn't real, and couldn't follow her far in this magnificent home-coming. . . . A hand, of which the fine sensitive shaping persisted through certain twistings and gnarlings of age, reached out to her tentatively; and as she took it, she drew a deep breath, felt the blood

tingling in her cheeks, walked as though only air were under her feet. Had there been any doubt, the hand-clasp must have reassured her, established her, disposed finally of that sullen incongruous figure behind. . . . This was her home: the lawns, the cedars, the roses—they were all for her. At sundown she would begin dressing for the ball. And Bruce would come to fetch her; and Miss Tiverton would be there, with her splendid lover; and the cat would be threading its slim way between the dancers, always following the glint of Miss Tiverton's high silver heels . . .

The rose garden opened to them, bewildering in its mid-summer glory. Roses in tall pillars; roses on spreading branches; roses on luxuriant bushes; roses springing close out of the rich dark soil—roses of every shade and blending of shades that a rose can be, all mingling their fragrance to make the air fit for immortal breathing . . .

She stopped, and her escort stopped. She bent her face over the cup of a deep crimson rose, drank the breath of it, felt it turn to magic elixir in her veins.

“That's your rose, isn't it?” her cavalier said, on an eager quavering note. “You shall wear one in your dark hair, Griselda, and the rest in the bosom of your gown. Here”—he turned his head in summons to the surly attendant—“cut this one, and all the others like it.”

As they passed from bush to bush, there was between them a little, happy, unspoken jest. . . . They both knew how clever it was to have pressed the attendant—that grotesque incongruity, that obstinate relic of a nightmare—into the service of a joyous reality. The more sullen he became, the closer they drew together in their silent laughter. . . .

Without acknowledgment, she took her red roses, one by one; and, laying them against her arm, felt herself absorb the proud beauty of them, even to her finger-tips.

Later in the day, Juliet Simpson was told that Lady Maud wanted to speak to her. She made her way to the sitting-room which had been pointed out to her as Lady

Maud's sanctum. Her first knocks were not heard: there was shrill talking on the other side of the door.

"And to think there's no getting rid of the creature!" she heard. "Of course, we simply bolstered up poor old Henry as long as we could, in case this should happen . . ."

"Roy shouldn't have taken Winscote," said Cousin Maud's gruff voice.

"Well, he had to go somewhere. She's harried him from pillar to post already."

Juliet knocked again.

"Upon my word, I don't think he *ought* to have gone to the war, if it meant leaving that woman on our hands. Why can't she go back for the present to her own people? No one cares to know her, except the officers in the training camp . . ."

Juliet knocked loudly.

"Come in," said Cousin Maud; and, as Juliet obeyed, threw in a hurried aside:

"I should say the future Lady L. knows a trick worth two of going back. . . ." Then she turned to the newcomer.

"Oh, it's you. What do you want, Juliet?"

"You sent for me, Cousin Maud."

"So I did. But I'm engaged now. You must come back."

Cousin Maud's companion, however, rose. She was a tall, gray-haired woman, with a handsome face marred, at the moment, by an expression of acute discontent.

"No need. I must go myself now. I see you think there's nothing to be done. We shall meet again soon."

Cousin Maud's eyes were upon Juliet, dubious and reflective. Just as her guest was departing, she said:

"Angela's youngest sister. She has come here to help. Juliet, this is Lady Lethbridge."

Lady Lethbridge barely touched Juliet's hand, barely looked at her. Her face suggested that the introduction had added insult to injury.

When the door had shut behind her, Cousin Maud laughed a little. It was not at all the kind of laugh which invites response.

But Juliet, for once in her life, was angry—angry as she would not have been but for Lord Templewood and the roses.

“Why does Lady Lethbridge treat me as if I was dirt?” she broke out. Her intonation was harsh, and, in her anger, not wholly free from a Cockney twang.

Cousin Maud—a rather formidable proposition in her robust, leathery old age—lifted shaggy eyebrows.

“Since when did you set up as a judge of your elders’ manners, young woman?”

“I don’t set up for anything. But aren’t I as good as she is?”

“Depends what you mean by ‘good.’ ”

“Well, I’m your relation,” said Juliet, flushing. “So’s Angela, if you come to that. I heard what she said about Angela, while I was waiting for you to answer my knocks. Of course, I know Angela’s more Simpson-ish than anything else, but it doesn’t follow that——”

“My dear child, time presses, and I’m afraid this interesting analysis of yourself and Angela will have to wait. . . . I’ve some things to say to you. In the first place, I want you to understand that my helpers don’t sit on the patients’ couches and flirt with them.”

“They’re mostly too busy, I suppose. But they would if they weren’t.”

“Oh, so that’s the tone, is it?” Cousin Maud’s thickset figure settled itself squarely in her upright chair. “It won’t do, my child.”

“What won’t? My tone?”

“Exactly; your tone. I should have imagined”—Cousin Maud spoke calmly and thoughtfully, without a trace of personal feeling—“I should have imagined that your long friendship with Margaret Sadler would have produced better results.”

Juliet dropped her eyes.

“Margaret’s so frightfully difficult to live up to,” she mumbled. “And it’s not as if I’d ever properly understood how she does it.”

“Does what?”

“I mean, how she manages to be so nice. She’s tried to teach me, and I’ve tried to learn—awfully hard I’ve tried. But it always seems as if you couldn’t be real and nice at the same time. And whatever happens I’m not going to be a sham.”

“H’m. That’s a laudable intention. But why does behaving decently commit you to being a sham?”

“Margaret and I don’t always seem to agree about what *is* behaving decently. For instance, a lot of the bothers I get into come from telling the truth.”

“Do you suggest that Margaret tells lies?”

“No, I’m sure she doesn’t. But”—Juliet, standing before her interlocutor, meditatively rubbed an ankle with the toe of her shoe—“but her truth’s always the kind it doesn’t matter telling.”

Cousin Maud’s grim mouth twitched a little at the corners. “That’s very possible. Truth is to a great extent for each of us what we make it.”

Juliet stared.

“Please, I don’t understand that a *bit*.”

“About people, for example. I dare say that, just as you said, there are some of my workers here who would behave foolishly with the men, if they weren’t too busy and too tired. Just conceivably, there may be one or two who do. But for the most part they *are* too busy and too tired, and they’re glad to be. Margaret would see and admire that.”

“Y-yes. But sometimes there aren’t two sides. Look at my father. Margaret says it isn’t nice of me to talk about him the way I do. But——”

“I don’t know much about your father, or the way you talk of him. But I suppose it results from the way you think of him. And there’s always a safe way of thinking about one’s father.”

“What way?” asked Juliet, awe-stricken.

“Thinking of him *as* your father—one of the two people in the world whom you are certainly bound to honor, and love if you can.”

Juliet gasped.

“Is *that* what niceness means? Then, it must be the most awful form of shamming.”

“Must it?” Cousin Maud gave her a long quiet look. After a moment she began speaking again, briskly.

“The other thing I wanted to say is that you were exceedingly foolish about my brother. I think you must have known that he is childish; and Simons, his attendant, tells me that he hinted to you as plainly as he could not to take any notice when you were accosted. In spite of that, you deliberately encouraged his delusion, and allowed him to rifle the rose garden! The gardener is in a mood to give notice!”

So that had been a crime!—that fairy episode of which the memory had thrilled her all day—that momentary, magic excursion into the heart of time immemorial. Juliet, listening, had felt a storm gathering within her; and now she could not answer without danger of tears. She turned away, her mouth quivering.

“Perhaps,” said Cousin Maud more gently, “you really didn’t understand?”

“I’ll give you back the roses. They’re in the jug in my room.”

“That wouldn’t help a bit. But you needn’t be so distressed, my child. Only don’t let anything of the sort happen again.”

“I don’t suppose it ever would . . .”

On the threshold Juliet stopped: suddenly the tears came, and with them a torrent of words.

“If you only knew what it was like—to get out, just for a few minutes—to *be* Griselda, like he thought me—not a Simpson any more, with people snubbing you and not calling. . . . Even the Sadlers—they never let Margaret come to tea, not once. . . . And all the really

beautiful things trying to keep away from you, because you're a member of your family. Griselda had everything, and could go anywhere, and have things come to her . . ."

There was a silence, broken only by the sound of sobs being fought down.

Then Cousin Maud said, very tenderly:

"You little fool! What you are, who you are, doesn't make all that difference. The glory of life is for any one, whether it's you or Griselda . . ."

From the trees outside the window a third voice spoke:

"Don't you know it? Don't you know it?"

Juliet put a question, low and tense:

"What *is* the glory of life?"

Cousin Maud smiled a little.

"That's asking secrets. But I suppose the very old have no right to secrets. People have different names for it, Juliet, and you might never get the same answer twice. I myself should call it vision."

"Vision? Do you mean just having eyesight?"

"Not physical eyesight.—A certain way of seeing things."

"Do you mean," Juliet asked breathlessly, "seeing things that other people don't see? Like—like time immemorial?"

Cousin Maud looked at her curiously: her lips parted as if for a question. But she did not ask it. After a reflective pause, she said:

"I may not know precisely what you mean by time immemorial. But if, as you say, you 'see' it, then, I think, you have vision; and the glory of life, for you, will be seeing it in everything, and everything in it."

"But—there are some things you *couldn't*," Juliet protested. "Some things have nothing to do with it. Father, for instance; and grandfather, who was such an awful rotter." Then she bit her lip. "Oh—I'm sorry, Cousin Maud. I forgot he was your relation first."

The expression of Cousin Maud's face was queer, no

doubt; but it did not suggest offense. She seemed to hesitate; then she put out her hand and took, from behind flowers on the table near her, a silver-framed photograph.

"That's your grandfather," she said quietly, handing it to Juliet.

Juliet took the photograph shyly, but with eager interest. At her first glance the interest became merged in bewilderment.

"Why, he looks perfectly splendid!" Her voice faltered. "A kind of story-book hero, and young and all. . . . You—you can't imagine him being so hopeless, and marrying granny, and having *us* for grandchildren."

She raised her eyes to find herself under the survey of Cousin Maud's—intent, inscrutable and faintly humorous. Nervously, she handed back the photograph. It was received in silence, and replaced behind the flowers.

"Does he," Cousin Maud said then, "fit into time immemorial?"

"Like that he does. . . . But not when Olive describes him."

"But once people have been in time immemorial they can't come out, can they?"

"I—don't know. There's only one person I know of—and her cat and her servants—who's really in it."

"Every one ought to be," said Cousin Maud.

CHAPTER XVII

JULIET had spent over a fortnight at Templewood House before Angela, at Winscote Vicarage, took any notice of her presence in the neighborhood. Then came a letter of complaining invitation:

“I’m much too busy to come over and see you. There are two hospitals near here, both bigger than Templewood, and I never get a moment, with all my social duties as well. Besides, it’s not *my* place to make the expedition. But I’m always at home on Sundays if you choose to come, and you’d better remember that one of these days I shall be in a position to be more useful to you than our antediluvian cousin.”

Juliet folded the letter with a sense of perplexity. Her rather haphazard duties allowed her a reasonable amount of leisure, and she could certainly find time for a visit to Winscote; but the means of transit presented a difficulty. Cars were constantly going in all directions from Templewood House, and more than once Cousin Maud had arranged some errand which would secure for her a pleasant drive; yet there had never been any suggestion of her going to see Angela. It couldn’t be that Cousin Maud had forgotten about Angela: she never forgot anything that she intended to remember.

The obvious course was to “sound” Margaret. Juliet did so at the first opportunity, and found Margaret less ready than usual with counsel.

“I don’t quite know what you’d better do,” she said uncomfortably.

“It seems silly, doesn’t it, for there to be any difficulty? Perhaps I could get round by train.”

“It would take you all day. Besides, it wouldn’t be necessary. Lady Maud could easily arrange for you to have a car if—if she was willing for you to go.”

“Why shouldn’t she be willing? The other day I went much farther than that.”

“It wouldn’t be a question of distance . . .”

“What *would* it be a question of, then? Do you mean she doesn’t like Angela?”

“It wouldn’t be that either, exactly . . .”

Juliet lost patience, as happened not seldom now in her intercourse with Margaret.

“I’d better ask Cousin Maud herself.”

“Yes,” said Margaret with relief, “I should.”

You might never lose a feeling of nervousness with Cousin Maud; but it was always worth “bearding” her: you got something definite for your pains. And, after all, she was a friend—or had been once, for a few minutes.

“D’you want to see your sister?” snapped Cousin Maud.

“Yes, I’d like to go.”

“You don’t include her in your wholesale condemnation of your family?”

Juliet blushed.

“Yes, I suppose I do. I don’t think much of Angela.”

“But, of course, you want to go and see where she lives, and how she lives, and all about her, out of curiosity.”

“I suppose that’s it,” Juliet admitted.

“Then you’d better. But I don’t mean to let you go often. In my opinion, your pretty sister is making an idiot of herself at Winscote, as you’ll probably have occasion to observe. And as I’m not sure that you haven’t the germs of the same kind of idiocy yourself——”

Juliet guessed at the meaning of this, and considered the remark uncalled-for. She had behaved quite (or nearly quite) correctly since her second day.

“Is it idiotic to speak to a man?” she demanded huffily.

“I shouldn’t go so far as that,” said Cousin Maud, unperturbed. “Well, you shall drive to Winseote on Sunday, my child—the only condition being that you take with you such glimmerings of good sense as you may possess.”

Juliet did not feel particularly injured as she left the room; for she had happened to catch in Cousin Maud's face a look that was only half serious but wholly kind.

There was nothing to suggest that you were in a vicarage garden, except that the church tower loomed almost immediately above your head, and that only a few yards from Angela's tea-table was a little gate opening on to a path that evidently led to the church. A bell was ringing, doggedly and monotonously. It seemed to worry Angela, who kept putting her delicate hands to her ears, and glancing wistfully at the five officers who were grouped, in various attitudes of *abandon*, around her hammock.

"You can't hear yourself *speak!*" she complained.

"We don't want to, so long as we can hear you," somebody answered.

"But why at tea-time?" another demanded. "It's not as if there isn't a time for everything, even religion."

"Yes, but you see, now Roy's away, we're being served from Denesford, and have to be fitted in."

"The padre won't try to fit *us* in, will he?" asked a third, in alarm.

"Oh, but of course not. You are privileged people. I sometimes feel *I* ought to go, only you'd all make such a fuss."

"We certainly should—an unholy fuss. No, Mrs. Lethbridge, don't smoke that. I've got some that are very extra special, sent me by a doting aunt. You try one too, Miss Simpson."

Juliet merely shook her head. Her manners were being bad this afternoon, she reflected—without any thought of mending them. The more these men tried to draw her into conversation the more forbidding she felt herself become. It wasn't so much that she disapproved of anything, as that she didn't want to be distracted from her observations. These were centered upon Angela, whom she found more interesting than ever before.

Angela's eyes were still full of shifting fogs; but now

and then, notably when they rested upon Juliet, the fog really had seemed to clear off, for the briefest imaginable instant, and something rather startling had shown itself—something taken by surprise. Once you had seen it, you could not altogether regain the impression of winsome irresponsibility that Angela usually created. It gave you a very queer feeling, when the fogs had closed up again, to watch her little, graceful, inconsequent gestures, the wistful, child-like upturnings of her face, the pretty play she made while lighting her cigarette, the smiles of ineffable sweetness bestowed everywhere on the slightest provocation—even, with no provocation, on her sister. Surely, too, some quality had been added to Angela's personality—a curious pervasiveness. It was no longer possible to be unaware of her: she seemed to dominate her surroundings instead of fading into them, or emerging imperceptibly from them, as she used to do at home. Perhaps it was just that at home there had not been conflict between Angela and her environment: here there was; and if she did not exactly subordinate the environment to herself, she nevertheless sapped it of all independent existence, threw it out of scale, made discord of its harmonies. The fragrances of the vicarage garden were overpowered by the perfumes lurking in the folds of her gown: her tinkling laughter, soft though it was, cut sharply across the songs of the birds: the coloring of her, produced by subtle blending of nature and artifice, was a challenge that kept drawing your eyes painfully away from her mellow green background. Try as she would, Juliet could not get a true picture of the old, nestling, creeper-covered house, the time-enriched garden, the deep recessed shrubberies, the moss-grown path to the church, the brooding benevolent tower whose aged gray stone was flecked with the gold of lichens: Angela made them incongruities. So far she had won the conflict; but she held her victory only by unremitting effort, by a straining of her vitality, by a nervous energy of self-assertion that dared not risk even a moment's lapse. In her languor, she was working fever-

ishly: in her *naïvetés* she was anxiously calculating. The church tower looming relentlessly above her pretty head seemed an outward and visible sign of the danger she fought incessantly—the danger of annihilation, of being reduced to the nothingness she was.

Once you had seen it all, in that brief parting of the fogs, you couldn't help being shocked: it was horrid and sinister. And Juliet would have dismissed it at that, but for the remembrance of her talk with Cousin Maud. Could there possibly be another way of seeing Angela?

The question occupied her till she caught sight of some one approaching down the path from the church. It was evidently the Vicar of Denesford, coming away from even-song. With his hand on the gate, he paused, and for a moment surveyed the party round the tea-table. Then, giving a little jerk to his shoulders, he came through and made his way to Angela.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Lethbridge. Can you tell me which day the Henderson funeral is to be?”

Angela, having excused herself for not getting out of her hammock, looked up at him anxiously.

“Has one of the Hendersons died? I didn't happen to hear. But that's dreadful—another funeral only about a week after the last one. No, I'm afraid I don't at all know what day they're likely to have it, but I should think you may take it that it will be fairly soon.”

“I want something more precise than that. I must arrange to be free, you understand.”

“It does seem a shame that you should be bothered to come over so often.”

“Do you think you could get a message sent to me to-morrow morning at latest?”

Angela looked worried.

“I could send, of course. I'm only wondering how I should find out in such a short time. I could ask in a minute, if I came across any of the Hendersons, and one of them does come sometimes to see my cook. But——”

“Perhaps,” said the Vicar of Denesford, “they might know at the Hall.” He glanced at his watch. “I’d better look in there on my way back.”

“That’s a splendid idea,” Angela answered with relief. “My sister-in-law visits quite a lot among the cottagers, and she’s sure to know, if any one does. But I do wish you’d have some tea. If you only knew how sweet of you I think it is, coming all this way to do Roy’s work.”

When he had left them, she sighed and looked round upon her court.

“None of you can imagine,” she said, “what it is to be a clergyman’s grass-widow. Perhaps if one was very strong one wouldn’t feel all the responsibility of thinking and organizing . . .”

Two or three of her companions dared to laugh, with affectionate indulgence. Angela seemed disconcerted, and darted a sharp glance at Juliet as if to ascertain whether she too had been amused. But Juliet was not amused: she was gravely studying the face of a dark thin-lipped man who had been comparatively silent all the afternoon. She watched him as he watched Angela. There was about his mouth a lurking sardonic grin; but it was his narrow eyes that intrigued her. They saw through Angela: pitilessly, they drew Angela’s eyes; and as the two glances met it seemed to Juliet that her sister made a sudden agonized clutch at something that was slipping from her. She herself had a queer impulse to jump up and distract that man’s vision: but, if nothing else had deterred her, she would have yielded to a suddenly-born conviction that any real disturbance of the situation was the last thing for which Angela would thank her. It had been made clear to her, in a flash, that this creature was Angela’s main objective.

She got up to go. Angela protested half-heartedly; then, after hesitation, announced an intention of accompanying her to the door. Some one lifted her out of her hammock; and, with a backward glance at her guests, and promises of not being long, she linked her arm in Juliet’s.

"I'm quite glad you came," she said, "though you're just the same unsociable little death's-head as ever. How are you getting on at Cousin Maud's?"

"All right."

"Isn't it very dull? Cousin Maud's rather a death's-head herself, I always think, like my dear mother-in-law. I haven't been in Templewood as much as I intended. There's such a lot going on here. I sing at the hospital concerts——"

"Didn't know you had a voice."

"Well, it may be small, but it seems to give pleasure. And I visit all the bad cases, and read and talk to them; and when they're better and want a change of surroundings, I try to keep open house for them as far as I can."

"Those aren't wounded officers you've got this afternoon, are they?"

"No, those are not, as it happens. You see, there's a huge training camp a few miles off, and one is so glad to be able to give the poor boys a little taste of quiet home life before they go out. But what I hate about it all is the pettiness—of one's neighbors, I mean. You'd think the war would help people to take a big view—but, dear me! in this little corner it doesn't. You rouse storms of jealousy if your house happens to be more attractive to the officers than other people's—and, of course, the peaceful atmosphere of a vicarage *does* appeal to them, though they're very reserved. Why, even Amy (Roy's sister, you know—that quiet little thing) can't bear their coming to the Vicarage more than they go to the Hall. Upon my word, I'm sick of it all sometimes, and if you're at all intimate with Cousin Maud, you might tell her about my difficulties, and say I should be quite willing to divide my services between this and Templewood House. I couldn't go there altogether, because, as you see, I have to run the parish now Roy's away; but I could go over several times a week."

Juliet considered before replying.

"I can't tell her that."

“Why on earth not?”

“Because—because she knows I know she wouldn’t want you.”

Angela recoiled; but she seemed too limp for real anger.

“You say that to me!” she gasped. “Surely you forget my position, and my husband’s prospects! Kindly explain, if you can, why Cousin Maud shouldn’t want me.”

“I think it’s just that you’re not her sort.”

“Her sort!” The repetition, intended to be forceful and dramatic, fell a trifle flat. “No, perhaps I’m not. And I’m sure I don’t want to be. But if *I’m* not, how is it that you are?”

“I’m not either. But—I’d rather like to be. Perhaps that’s the difference. I do wonder sometimes at her having me.”

“Oh, if you talk like that,” Angela exclaimed, shrilly and querulously, “I’ve no patience with you. You’re a little toady. You ought to give Cousin Maud as good as you get, like I do my mother-in-law. Haven’t we got Templewood blood in our veins?”

“I suppose so,” said Juliet rather hopelessly. It might be there, but it seemed, on occasions, curiously ineffectual, as now, when the refined ethereal Angela became suddenly, in voice and look and manner, unmistakably common.

Soon after her return she came across Margaret, who asked her if she had had a nice time.

“Quite all right,” Juliet said. “Winscote’s very pretty, and Angela seems comfortable. She’d a lot of friends to tea, and looked ripping.”

To a terse question in the same sense from Cousin Maud, she answered simply: “No.”

She would have liked to say more; but opportunities for talking to Cousin Maud were evidently to be few and far between. They did not meet very often, and when they did, it was usually by chance, and only for a moment. Templewood House Hospital was a huge mechanism, in

which Juliet's very humble functions implied no direct contact with the mainspring. Her orbit brought her more often into touch with Margaret; but, on the whole, it was a lonely existence, conditioned by irrefragable laws that took no account of personal relations.

Juliet, in the dogged dull routine, was losing her sense of time immemorial. So far from widening its scope in the mysterious way suggested by Cousin Maud, she seemed to be crowding it out of her existence by enforced pre-occupations, which (whatever Cousin Maude might say) could have no possible association with it. Even Miss Tiverton was becoming a passive memory; and, as the summer drew to a close, the little bird had given up asking its question. . . .

She thought that she could have recovered her lost world, at least sometimes, had there been any repetition of the Griselda episode. Now, however, she was always careful not to encounter the wheeled chair, even while she wondered at her own respect for Cousin Maud's prohibitions in this and in other matters.

Moreover, she suffered a good deal from the silence of Bruce. He never sent her a message, though surely he must have heard of her being at Templewood House. And apparently it never occurred to Margaret to read extracts from his letters: if she mentioned him at all in Juliet's hearing, it was only in the give-and-take of general conversation.

Once or twice, Juliet thought of writing to Bruce. From all she could hear, it seemed quite in order nowadays to write even to men you had never seen, provided they were at the front. Men at the front were not like ordinary men, according to Margaret, and also, as she had now discovered, to Margaret's fellow-workers. You could have the most thrilling correspondences with them, and it would all be part of your war-work. Why then should she not write to Bruce once a week as a bit of war-work? She felt sure he would answer her. Then, just as she was deciding to make this simple experiment, her thoughts

would go off at a tangent: she would fancy Cousin Maud calling it idiotic, and began to wonder why things that were all right for other people should be condemned as idiotic for her. Anyhow, she did not write to Bruce; and the arrival of the post, which caused a romantic flutter among her colleagues, remained to her a matter of indifference: it brought her only letters from her mother.

The Simpson ménage appeared to be in a worse way than usual. Her mother persistently alluded to ill-health: the servant problem had never been so acute: Mr. Simpson was making himself "difficult" in the home, and was altogether in a very upset condition, poor man—of course, with ample excuse, considering the shortage of butter and the almost complete breakdown of his business occasioned by this tiresome war. Miss Tiverton, too, was exceedingly trying to his nerves (in what particular respect Juliet could not ascertain: it must be just that she continued to live—though, in the present state of the building trade, it was not quite clear how her death at the moment could have benefited Mr. Simpson). Mr. Townley had, very unnecessarily, scraped into the army—a great pity, as he always seemed to understand how to manage father. And Leslie was causing anxiety. Mrs. Simpson wrote vaguely about this, merely reiterating that people knew more about what their sons were doing, and were in less danger of being ruined by them, when they were safely at the front—only there, of course, there was the risk of being hurt, or even killed, so perhaps it was all for the best. Olive, too, hadn't been behaving quite prettily. In view of her impossible husband being in France, and of her having two children on her hands and another event expected, Mr. Simpson had lately consented to a renewal of relations, and had even not objected to her being invited to Ashtree Towers for the birth of the twins (of course, he didn't know it would be twins). Olive had refused the invitation; and, the first time her parents went to call after the twins' arrival, had drawn attention to the fact that they were *both* the living image of "her Harry."

These letters varied only in respect of their increasing gloom. But there was no hint of Juliet's being wanted. She had never had any part to play at home; and it evidently did not occur to Mrs. Simpson that her presence could be useful or cheering. Besides, no doubt, she fulfilled an important function so long as she continued to figure as "my daughter at Templewood House."

Margaret, from time to time, showed a good-natured interest in her letters from home.

"Everything seems pretty rotten," Juliet would say callously. "I'm glad I'm out of it."

But there came a day when Margaret questioned her more closely.

"Do you think your mother is really ill, dear?"

"Haven't a notion. You can't go much by what she says. But she does keep all on about it."

"She must have a good many anxieties. Your father's profession has suffered from the war, no doubt."

"Yes, and he's more like a bear with a sore head than ever, from what mother says. She seems to be having a pretty slim time."

"I don't want to seem interfering, Juliet dear, but—if I may take the privilege of an old friend—does it ever occur to you that perhaps you may be wanted at home?"

"I'm sure I'm not. Probably I should make things worse."

Margaret smiled, with a look of tender indulgence that struck Juliet as forced.

"I don't say you mightn't, in some of your funny little moods! But I think perhaps you *could* make things better, if you had a mind to."

"Well, I haven't. I'm doing war-work, and surely that's more important than dancing attendance on father's tempers?"

"I was thinking of your mother's health."

"Mother'd be quite as lost as Angela without her health—if you know what I mean."

Margaret smiled again, and sighed.

"I believe you turn down other people's suggestions on principle!"

"What nonsense!" said Juliet moodily. "I'm always taking suggestions, even when they're a frightful nuisance. But honestly, Margaret, I can't see any sense in this one."

"Not till you've thought it over," answered Margaret lightly.

At supper in the staff-room that evening, Margaret being absent on duty, Juliet overheard the fragment of a conversation in which her friend's name occurred.

"I wonder if she got any more news of her brother to-day," some one said.

"Yes, she told me her father had written to her this morning. It's only a leg-wound—not serious. He's going to try to wangle being sent here. Won't Margaret be bucked if it comes off?"

Juliet leaned forward over the table.

"Are you," she said, with a little catch in her breath, "talking about Bruce Sadler?"

"Yes—Margaret's brother. Of course, she told you her news? I saw you talking together."

"She didn't tell me. When was he wounded?"

"Oh, she heard that a few days ago."

In a corridor, on her way to bed, Juliet met Margaret.

"Good night, dear," Margaret said.

"You never told me Bruce was wounded, and coming here."

"Oh—didn't you know? But it's only slight, you see. And as for his coming here, one can't be certain; only he hopes he may be able to bring it about. It would be nice for me, and he's so devoted to Lady Maud."

Juliet lay awake for some time that night. Her cheeks made the pillow hot, and her nerves were all jangled, and her heart wouldn't keep still. She mustn't, she wouldn't, think such things of Margaret. Why, there would be no-

body to trust if Margaret could be so mean as that. She couldn't be: there was no hint of meanness in her eyes, or anywhere in her face; and everybody loved her: she must really have meant that about the duty of going home. But it would be an unnatural thing to do, unless there were a definite request. In that case, Juliet decided, she would go: anyhow, she would go if Cousin Maud said she ought to. But surely Fate wouldn't be so unkind as to let this happen just when Bruce was coming . . .

Oh, she was glad now that she hadn't gone on being an idiot with Captain Stanley and the others like him. Would Cousin Maud say she was an idiot about Bruce? Well, if she did—let Cousin Maud go hang!

CHAPTER XVIII

STRANGE that you should live for ten days under the same roof with some one who counted for you, and barely exchange a word with him. But Juliet's menial tasks rarely took her to the ward where Bruce was established; or if they did, it was only for the speedy accomplishment of some errand, or the receiving of hurried orders from the sister in charge. It would have been heart-breaking, if she had not come to know that Bruce was nevertheless aware of her. Now and then, even down the whole length of the ward, she would see his eyes turned on her; and her imagination supplied the individual quality of their glance. She was sure that he looked at her searchingly, critically, but always with a whimsical affection not far removed from tenderness.

When the autumn days were sufficiently mild, he spent a good deal of his time in a lounge-chair under the cedars; and she noticed that he was popular among his companions in misfortune—always the center of a little group who seemed to find his conversation entertaining. Many a glimpse Juliet had of him, leaning back with his head against cushions, blowing smoke-rings, and lazily talking or listening, with an air of supreme content. But, invariably, if she passed anywhere near, he caught sight of her, and watched her, though without causing any lapse in the conversation around him, or making any sign that could be construed into an invitation to her to come within speaking distance.

The nurses petted him, and in return he chaffed them and mildly philandered with them. Margaret devoted to him her brief spells of leisure. It must have been patent to the most casual observer that Bruce valued her companionship more than any other; and she went about her work with increased sweetness and renewed zest. Juliet saw much less of her now.

She had never felt so lonely. At the same time, she could imagine no greater calamity than having to leave Templewood House while Bruce was there. Sometimes, in her desperation, she wondered whether he would go home, and thence back to the war, before she had even had the chance to find out whether she or Margaret were right about him. In his external aspect, he conformed to her own idea of him, save that he looked a little older, with his mustache, and more responsible. But in his aloofness from her, he confirmed Margaret's presentment of him. It was as if he knew that he could not be properly seen except by Margaret and those who shared her vision of the supermen . . .

Her off-duty hours, when they occurred toward evening, were spent in the misty solitudes of the beech-woods. As the autumn drew on, these woods were sympathetic to her loneliness. She liked the flutter and crackle of the falling leaves; the damp, fungus-y smell of the tree-trunks; the studied optimism of the robins, alone in their glory; the muggy climate that belongs to woods; the aimless dripping from the branches overhead, even when it had not actually rained. She liked to watch the sun, shorn of its splendid trappings, go down behind the blue distance, a naked red ball. Whenever that happened, it awoke in her a longing (of the kind that hurts) for Miss Tiverton's; and the pain of that longing was inseparable from the exquisite pain of knowing Bruce to be in the great house below, inaccessible to her, yet unfailingly cognizant of her. . . . Now, as Miss Tiverton, in the mysterious quietude of the autumn evening, in the still red glow of the sunset, crept back into life and power, dominating all the world outside that great, forbidding mechanism which had Bruce in its clutches, it seemed to her that if Bruce would come to her up here there could be no barriers between them. Even if her thoughts of him, and of everything, were wrong, there would be space enough, leisure enough, for adjustments—in time immemorial. They

would explore it together, while Miss Tiverton, with no age but only tremendous knowledge, smiled upon them in the sunset. They would give each other new points of view. If Bruce were some kind of hero she had never imagined, she would discover it joyously, without fear; and, for return, he would discover in her—Griselda. And it would all be quite natural: at the grand crisis of discovery, they would forget to be solemn, and would ask each other, laughing, why they had never understood before. . . . And just as the sun went down, Miss Tiverton would glance at them; and her glance would say: "Didn't I tell you so?"

One evening, as she sat thus in the gray gloaming, Bruce did come. Laboriously, helping his "game" leg with a crutch, he climbed the little stony path. She watched him coming. Any one else, perhaps, would have got up, gone down to meet him, offered the support of an arm. But Juliet did not stir. It was a thing written, inevitable, that he should seek her and find her just here, in the gray mist, among the dropping leaves, with the red sun going down over the wide plain . . .

She sat motionless on her fallen tree-trunk, watching while he picked his difficult way—put aside, with his one free hand, the barriers and brambles, measured the height of the last rocky hillock that separated him from the clearing where she sat. Then, as he came up to her, she lifted her eyes to his in silent greeting: there seemed little need for words, now that he had got here and their great adventure was begun. . . .

Bruce smiled at her as he settled himself beside her on the tree-trunk; but to Juliet the moment was too solemn even for smiling.

"You never come near me," were his first words; "and we used to be pals."

Juliet scarcely knew what to answer.

"It wouldn't have been any good—down there."

He laughed.

“Certainly we’re cozier up here. But it’s rather a stiff climb for a lame duck like me.”

Juliet glanced at his crutch propped against the tree-trunk. It annoyed her a little that he should allude to his physical disabilities—as if they mattered, now that he had joined her.

“What did you mean, exactly,” he asked her, “by saying it wouldn’t be any good down there?”

She gave him a look almost of impatience: if he really didn’t understand, how could she explain?

“You were always mysterious,” he said, as her silence remained unbroken. “But I think I can answer my own question. You’re not the same Juliet down there in the hospital crowd. It’s not your element, is it?”

“Not any more than it’s yours.”

“Have I got an element, then?”

Her gaze dwelt on him. There was a reserve in him that she had not anticipated, that she hardly knew how to deal with: she read it in his eyes and in every line of his face.

“Don’t you know,” she said, “when you’re up here?”

“I’m not sure. . . . Perhaps I begin to feel it. It’s very peaceful up here. Is peacefulness my element?”

“Oh, no—not just peacefulness.”

“You shall tell me what you think it is.”

Juliet half turned away from him.

“I can’t. I thought you would know.”

She felt him looking at her, through a long pause.

“Did you expect I should come and find you in your little dug-out?”

“I don’t know. . . . It seemed natural when you did.”

“It was only by chance I discovered where you went, when you were free from pots and pans. I happened to see you climbing the hill. If I’d known, I should have come before.”

“Yes, I suppose you would.”

“But I hope you realize that I came in fear and trem-

bling? You might have been displeased. In fact, I can't be quite sure, even now, that you're not."

"Oh, don't talk to me," she said petulantly, "as if I was one of the nurses."

The effect of that was to make Bruce, for the first time, grave.

"No, I won't," he answered. "I agree that it's a stupid waste of time."

Juliet sighed with relief.

"You'd better smoke," she said happily.

"Why?" But he drew out his case and lighted a cigarette.

"I want to ask you some things. And I've always imagined asking you them in a wood while you smoked cigarettes."

"The plot thickens. . . . Ask away."

"First, I want to know how you really think about the war."

"But, my child, to answer you I should have to begin thinking about it. And I don't want to—just now."

Juliet laughed a little; then she took the crutch and put it away out of sight, behind the tree-trunk. Bruce watched her through the cigarette-smoke, a smile playing about his lips.

"What's the inwardness of that?"

"You've answered the way I always thought you would. The war's only a kind of accident, isn't it?"

"A rather big accident, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I suppose so. It's very dreadful, I know, for people who are in it. But it doesn't really change anything, does it? I mean, that when you come out, even if it's only for a little while, you're the same yourself, and everything that really matters is there for you just as usual."

Bruce seemed to be considering her curiously.

"I think your eyes are twice as big as they used to be," he remarked; "or else it's something to do with the sunset getting into them."

"You haven't answered," Juliet said.

"No. But I assure you I was thinking. What you say strikes me as a little vague. As to whether one remains the same person—you shall ask me again a few years after the peace. As to 'everything that really matters'—one wants a definition."

Juliet took up a handful of crisp red leaves, turned them over in her palm, and let them fall again, one by one. Then she lifted her eyes and looked away to the crimson cloud-streaked west. More leaves came fluttering down on a sudden breeze—the last little stirring of the wood before sleep should overpower it. A very small star grew diffidently out of the misty sky—uncertain whether its hour had come.

"The war's going on somewhere," she said softly. "But you can't hear it—you can't see it. What you do hear and see is so much bigger—the sky over there, and the leaves falling . . ."

"Are leaves falling bigger than men falling?"

"Yes, I think so," answered Juliet gravely. "Because it's been happening for ever and ever."

"So has the other, one might retort. But I know what you mean. The fortunes of humanity count for very little in your pagan philosophy!"

"I don't know about humanity. But human beings count; at least, some do. And when they count, you can't see them mixed up with the war, and things like that, except as a kind of accident. The war doesn't make any difference to——" She stopped short: Bruce might not know what she meant by time immemorial, although he was just coming into it.

"You and me?" he said.

Juliet started: his tone was expressionless, his face a mask: his eyes were fastened on the vanishing red disk of the sun.

"I—I wasn't going to say that," she faltered. (But it did come to much the same thing.)

Bruce watched the sun till it had quite disappeared.

Then, very slowly, almost reluctantly, he turned to her: they could barely see each other in the deepening dusk.

"You're a witch," he said. "Do you know, you've put me under the spell of another world, up here in this eyrie of yours?"

"I wanted to . . ."

"You wanted to? How long have you been wanting it?"

"I suppose ever since Margaret made out that you were too grand to have anything to do with, because of being in the war."

"Good heavens!" His astonishment was tinged with displeasure. "That doesn't ring true of Margaret. You misunderstood her."

"It's the way she seemed to be seeing you. But not only Margaret. Lots of them are like it."

It was evident that, for a moment, his temper hung nicely balanced between annoyance and amusement. Then he laughed.

"I dare say we're glorified more than is good for us. So you thought you'd kindly arrange to make me feel small?"

"Not that a *bit*. I only wanted to be certain that the war hadn't spoiled you for— No, it's no good: I can't make you see if you don't."

"I'm telling you, I do see a little. I've seen a world where the war, as you say, is only an accident, and where you do feel small—but perhaps, so that you're glad to be. I saw it just now, when the sun was going down. And no doubt I should see it still in your eyes, if it wasn't so dark."

"You don't have to look anywhere particularly."

"*You* don't, perhaps. You're in it, I suspect, and always have been. But I——"

"Please, what?"

"I'm hopelessly pedestrian. There's nothing in me, except a little music; and even that seems to be dying out under the present conditions of life. At this moment

I feel it beginning to resurrect. But I'm afraid I shall always be more of a clod than anything else, except when I'm with you. And that"—he hesitated—it seemed to Juliet for a very long time; and finished on a strained note of inconclusiveness: "That's all too seldom."

It was quite dark now. Nothing broke the silence of the woods. And there came to Juliet an unimagined experience. She felt, in every nerve, the presence of some one beside her who was neither her Bruce nor Margaret's, but a being of measureless, mysterious forces—forces that were in conflict because of her. She knew herself to be in the very center of his consciousness, and to exist, in that moment, nowhere else. She was utterly passive; utterly without emotion, save a cold still joy of surrender. It disturbed her not at all to realize, as she did realize, remotely, disinterestedly, that her condition was one of extreme suspense. . . .

The darkness hid no world. There was no world, unless he chose to make one. Time immemorial, whether he knew it or not, had been delivered over into the hollow of his hand: a gesture from him, and it would be recreated, would gather up its powers, would flow back into the void; and living would become possible again. It was a question of what Bruce wanted; and all of him (as how, being herself the point of cleavage, should she fail to see?) did not want the same thing.

She had no wish to hasten the decision, nor any fear of what it should be. At best, she and Bruce would rise up to take possession of all that was and had ever been: at worst, there would be for her this ecstasy of nothingness, this refuge of infinite, impregnable void.

She had forgotten, till the great gong sounded in the house below, that in either event there would be the daily outward living. Even now it was Bruce who rose first, recovered his crutch, groped toward the path that should lead them down.

"If you don't mind," he said, still in a strange voice that told nothing, "I'm going to ask you for your arm."

Somebody met her indoors with the information that Lady Maud had been wanting her for the last two hours.

Juliet went straight to her cousin's sitting-room. Margaret was there; but she got up when Juliet entered, and, with a smile, passed out.

Juliet waited in silence—occupied, while Cousin Maud surveyed her, in trying to get her wits about her. Cousin Maud, and all that she stood for, had become utterly meaningless; but, through some lingering contact with normal life, Juliet was warned that it wouldn't do to let her see that.

"Where on earth have you been hiding yourself, child?"

"It was my off-duty time."

"I'm not disputing it. All the same, I rather wish you had happened to be accessible. Roy Lethbridge has been here, and wanted to speak to you."

"Oh," said Juliet; then, on a labored after-thought: "Isn't he in France?"

"He was, till the day before yesterday. He came back on special leave. He is resigning Winscote."

"Oh. . . . Why?" The question was put so listlessly that Cousin Maud met it with a still sharper gaze.

"You'll have to know sooner or later; so wake up, and attend to what I'm saying. Your sister appears to have overreached herself in certain ways. It's beginning to cause scandal. But scandals, mind you, are easily caused in the country, and I suspect that your Angela is more foolish than criminal. Roy wants her to go back to your people till he's home for good; but she says they can't have her. Is that true?"

"No, it's not. Of course they can have her."

"Very well. I'll let him know what you say."

Cousin Maud turned to her letters. But Juliet, who had been gradually "coming to," was suddenly perplexed,

uneasy, even a little frightened—though vaguely, as at some danger apprehended by a sixth sense, and wholly undefined. It seemed to be connected with Margaret's smiling as she left the room.

"Margaret was with you," she said. "Does Margaret know?"

"From me, she knows only the bare fact that Roy is resigning his family living. I can't say she may not have put two and two together."

Still Juliet did not move.

"Do you ever," she inquired, after a pause, "discuss me with Margaret?"

Cousin Maud looked up from the letter she had been reading. "That's impertinent," she said quietly.

"I don't care if it is. . . ." Juliet spoke desperately now. "I want to know. Do you say to Margaret what you've said to me—that I'm the same kind of idiot as Angela?"

"I never did say that. I merely said that you had the germs of Angela's idiocy. And (if it's any satisfaction to you) I have not said so to Margaret."

"Then please don't. Because it isn't true."

"You strike me," said Cousin Maud, in her most detached manner, "as being not quite responsible to-night. In return for your catechism—and admonitions—I feel very much inclined to ask you where you've been."

Their eyes met. Juliet knew that she was not responsible: the nameless shapeless terror was luring her past all reason and convention: she must pursue it, grapple with it, destroy it, even if she didn't know exactly what it was.

"There's no secret," she said between quick-drawn breaths, "no mystery. . . . I've been up in the beechwoods with Bruce. It wasn't—idiocy. . . ." And, all involuntarily, she threw out her hands in a little gesture of appeal.

Cousin Maud lowered her eyes, folded a letter, put it back into its envelope.

"Did any one," she asked then, "say it was?"

"I thought you would."

"I don't know why you should have thought so. Is there anything more you want to say to me?"

"No. I didn't really want to say that."

Cousin Maud kept silence, but made no sign of dismissal. Her down-bent face had fallen into heavier lines, as though, while her fingers occupied themselves mechanically, she were deeply, anxiously, considering. Once her lips moved a little; and, whether from the form of their movement or from a scarcely audible sound escaping them, Juliet knew that she had said to herself: "Bruce Sadler."

"It may happen," she began, after that weighty pause, "that one day you will be glad you did. If, for instance, you should ever feel a need of talking . . ."

"I'm beginning to be glad already," Juliet answered softly. "After all, you know about time immemorial."

"Yes—a little. Should you say there was any possibility of suffering in time immemorial?"

Juliet shook her head.

"There's sorrowfulness. That's different."

"Perhaps," Cousin Maud said, more to herself than to Juliet, "that's one of its functions—to turn suffering into sorrowfulness." Then she looked up. "Whatever happens, you mustn't lose time immemorial."

Fear crept back upon Juliet.

"I mightn't be able to help it."

"There's some one, I think you said, who's always in it—some one who safeguards it for you?"

"Yes, there was: at least, there seemed to be. But"—Juliet flushed deeply—"but it doesn't follow that you could get in by yourself, or even go on seeing it. It might be as if—as if a door had shut, and somebody else had got the key."

"That needn't happen," said Cousin Maud. "Don't you ever think it. Don't think that any one, even"—she looked straight into Juliet's eyes—"even Bruce Sadler, has power to keep you out of that world."

Juliet stared at her, trembling under a sudden onslaught of emotion—defiance, fear; but more defiance than fear.

“Why shouldn’t I think it?”

“You may give the power, by thinking so.”

“Why shouldn’t there be—some one—who has that power?”

“Because, whether knowingly or not, he might use it.”

“You mean—you’re trying to tell me something. You think that Bruce . . .”

“I don’t know,” Cousin Maud said quietly. “But I am afraid. Come and kiss me, child.”

So—it was going to be the void? Juliet knew, when she groped her way out of the room, why Margaret had been smiling. . . . And the void did not look the same as when she had envisaged it, with Bruce at her side, in the beech-woods. Now, it seemed to offer no refuge—only exile.

PART FOUR

THE VOID

CHAPTER XIX

THERE was no basement in Ashtree Towers. You sat, therefore, during air-raids, on anything you could find to sit upon in the back passage. Nobody knew why this should be safer than the hall, or even than the drawing-room: the servants declared it to be so, and Mr. Simpson must have been impressed by their opinion, since he had given orders that here, and here only, the family should assemble at sound of the first maroon. Conceivably he may have felt, as regarded his own august person, that the back passage was not a place in which bombs would expect to find him.

On the night of the big air-raid in March, 1918, he sat in a rather cramped position on an empty wine-case. Near him, on the bottom step of the back stairs, was Angela, huddled and shivering. On the step above her, heavily packed up with rugs and cushions, and also shivering, as much from the draught as from fear, was Mrs. Simpson, who ought to have been in bed, and had been in bed all day—till the signal maroons provoked a mobilization order. At intervals, along each side of the passage, the domestic staff was posted. It leaned uncomfortably against the walls, shuffling from one leg to the other, sometimes emitting groans and sometimes giggles—for it represented a variety of ages and temperaments. At the far end of the passage, looking out from a slit of barred window, stood Juliet. This was considered culpable in Juliet, as constituting a danger to the rest of the party. True, the window

would not in any case have been covered, as it possessed neither blind nor curtain; and it gave out no light, for there was no light in the passage, save a little that filtered in from the harassed moon. Still, to stand in front of the window was a provocative act, and Juliet had been ordered many times to come and sit down on the stairs. Mr. Simpson had even offered her a corner of his wine-case. But Juliet wouldn't come. In these days she wouldn't necessarily do what she was told. She never did anything that she couldn't (as she put it) see sense in; and apparently she couldn't see sense in not looking out of the passage window.

"If you're killed," Mr. Simpson called to her, "you'll have only yourself to blame. And if we're all killed as well, perhaps you'll feel remorse."

"I should be so busy blaming myself for my own death," Juliet (without turning) threw back in her clear voice, "that I mightn't have time."

One of the younger servants tittered, and a curious sound came from Mr. Simpson, as if he were trying to swallow rage. Possibly he was helped in this by a deafening explosion that shook the house. It changed the current of his thoughts.

"Was that next door?" he asked excitedly. "Do you think it fell in the old woman's garden? Juliet, see if you can see."

"I'll go and look from an upper window," she said obligingly.

"Yes, do," Mr. Simpson urged. "The bathroom window. I think it must have been next door."

"But then," Angela interposed, "the raid would be dreadfully near. It might come to us. Oh, Juliet,"—she clutched at the figure trying to pass her on the stairs—"don't go up! Oh, isn't it fearful!" Her moan was stifled by another reverberating crash.

Juliet wrenched her skirts free of Angela's grip; but she paused above the next stair, where her mother was quietly sobbing.

"Don't mind so, mother," she whispered. "There've been dozens before. It isn't really much closer than usual."

"I keep thinking of Olive and Leslie and the babies," Mrs. Simpson managed to answer. "If only they were here!"

"Perhaps they're in some still safer place. Leslie's sure to be."

"I hope so, indeed. But if only we were all together!"

As it was dark, Juliet indulged in a shrug; but she refrained from saying, though the words were on her lips, that there were far too many of them as it was.

She went to her own bedroom on the top floor. Perhaps she did flinch a little as she drew aside the window-curtains, for the sky was shot across with incessant lurid flashes; and the monotonous drone of the Gothas was harder to bear than the explosions of their missiles: it keyed you up to a pitch of nervous expectancy. But yet, in a way, you could be thankful for the air-raids: they lifted you out of your circumstances; gave sanction to that sense you carried about with you in daily life of everything, even yourself, being unreal. . . . They made you insignificant to yourself—an atom at the mercy of blind chance. There was no fear in that, but a kind of rest. For the moment, at least, you need not chafe at feeling yourself to be a mere shell of personality: it gave you a certain advantage, to feel like that: it rendered you immune from anxiety as to what might happen to you. Moreover—the thought grew slowly in her as she opened her window to the rent and quivering air—this death-heavy night was in some sense her avenger. She had been set aside; and this night seemed to make of all human beings insignificant atoms. Wherever he might be—the man who, inclined to love her, had yet been persuaded to range himself under a paltry standard, to judge her by it, to find her wanting—wherever he might be, he too, no doubt, was at the mercy of chance. If he had refused to possess with her a world transcendent, if he had anni-

hilated that world for himself and for her, he could not refuse (blind chance so decreeing) to be at one with her in dust and nothingness. . . . There were no social distinctions in dust and nothingness; and it would be a world that he could not annihilate.

Silence came at last; and, in the silence, a little sound of leaves stirring and whispering together.

The momentary passing of danger brought back upon her a sordid realization of things as they were, and would be. She visualized the head-lines in to-morrow's paper; anticipated the remarks her father would make at breakfast, between mouthfuls of fried bacon. He and every one who had escaped (most people, in fact) would be smugly congratulating themselves and one another.

What, she questioned bitterly, was at the bottom of this curious predilection, common to all human beings, for having things remain as they were? Why was change the one thing dreaded? Why was it better that her father, to-morrow morning, should be in a position to eat his bacon (which at best he could do only for a limited number of years) than that he should have been launched by a bomb into the comparatively great adventure of destruction? But it *was* better according to all accepted principles. So with her mother, with Angela, with herself: it would be considered a pity if any one of them were to be suddenly submerged in the full tide of their daily futilities. So also, if in a slightly less degree, with Miss Tiverton . . .

Juliet turned a full gaze on to Miss Tiverton's.

The steady light of the moon, freed, at this moment, from the confusion of searchlights and shell-flashes, showed her the familiar silhouette of chimneys and gables and tree-tops; reflected itself in the glass panes of two straight shut windows. Juliet gazed as she had been wont to gaze since childhood; but now she saw things she had never seen in the old days.

She saw dreariness in it all; monotony; insignificance;

a dull dreadfulness of something that no one needed waiting inertly for its end. And yet—and yet, if a bomb had chanced to descend on that gray slate roof, there would have been many to wring hands and cry: “Poor old lady!”

This new vision of Juliet’s might guard her against illusions, but it could not rob the silent changeless habitation over there of its power to compel her attention—to make her realize, however dispassionately, the presence in close neighborhood of some one who, during this last hour, had been shadowed, with her, by ultimate crisis. And it was impossible for her not to make some effort of imagining. . . . Did you, as old as that, count it a boon when death passed you by? Did you, perhaps, when danger loomed, creep into a place where you should think yourself more safe? Or did you, at the first warning sound of it, lift your palsied head, straighten your bowed figure, peer with your dim eyes to see what the night was bringing? and, holding your thin difficult breath, wait so in a trance of expectancy that recalled some happier, more eager waiting in the days of your legendary youth?

Searchingly, sternly almost, Juliet regarded those austere windows, those sphinx-like chimneys, that impenetrable slate roof. For some unknown reason it mattered urgently that she should be certain whether, behind and beneath them, there was cringing, hiding—or a tremulous getting-ready, a wistful, wordless invitation.

Once again the night was disembodied by a mighty explosion, dazing her and making her reel. But, through it all, there remained a point of rest, inexorably holding her eyes even in their momentary sightlessness—the austere windows, the sphinx-like chimneys, the impenetrable roof. And now they seemed to challenge her with a third alternative. Coldly, half in pity, half in contempt for her stupidity, they offered the suggestion that Miss Tiverton neither dreaded nor desired—that this man-made pandemonium affected her as little as did Mr. Simpson’s wooden belve-

dere (rising stark in the moonlight) from which he had never seen anything.

Was it Cousin Maud who said that the very old had no right to secrets? Juliet, in sudden anger, clenched her hands. It was true, she told herself passionately—they had no right. If they could accomplish the impossible, if they could go on living imperturbably long after life had done to them its best and its worst, then surely there must be a duty laid on them to declare what they knew of life. . . .

Somewhere along the old road bugles sounded the "All Clear" signal. She heard movements below—footsteps, the opening of doors, the throwing up of a window. Probably her father was looking to see if damage had been done over the wall.

There was no sound of movement from Miss Tiverton's—save that suddenly a brown owl blundered out of its tree and took flight to another.

Juliet turned as some one quietly opened her door. For a moment she was startled by the figure on the threshold, whose face and draperies were, in the moonlight, of an equal whiteness. Then, recognizing Angela, she drew down the window-blind and switched on the electric light. But Angela protested against the sudden glare: she was evidently distressed; and Juliet, observing it, put out the lights and uncovered her window again to the moon.

Angela, trembling, sank down on the edge of the bed.

"You never came back."

"No. I preferred being here. Why didn't father come up and fetch me?"

"He forgot all about you. Wasn't the raid awful?"

"A fairly ordinary specimen. Rather nearer than usual, I suppose."

"Juliet, don't they frighten you, really? I can't understand you."

"Perhaps I was frightened. I don't know. I can't see why one should be."

"But people are killed—lots of people—every time."

"Well, it would be quite a nice sudden death."

"Juliet, do you mean you wouldn't *mind* being killed?"

"Would you?"

"What an extraordinary question! Of course I should. One ought to."

"But, surely, as a clergyman's wife," said Juliet flippantly, "you ought to be quite ready to go to heaven."

"So I hope I should be, if I had to. But——"

"You mean it would be rather flat to go too soon, like arriving early at a party."

"How irreverent you are! You don't take anything seriously."

"What is there to take seriously?"

"Well, your religion, for one thing. It ought to have taught you better than that."

"My religion?" Juliet repeated blankly.

"You don't mean to say"—Angela nervously drew together the folds of her white kimono, as if to guard them against contamination, while her sister flung herself, in a sprawling attitude, on the bed—"you don't mean to say you don't believe in anything?"

"As you remark, I don't mean to say it. I haven't got anything to say."

"But, Juliet, you *do* believe in God, don't you? Why, you've always been to church. You go still."

"I know I do. Somehow I never thought of not going, if only to give father encouraging glances while he hands round the bag. But it *is* rather silly of me, now you come to mention it."

"Then—it's really as bad as that? You've lost your faith?"

"Perhaps you're right. I have lost something, though it never seemed to have anything to do with churches. But it did give me a sort of glimmering of what people meant when they talked about God."

"And now"—Angela was more and more agitated—"now do you really think there isn't anything?"

“Anything?”

“Anything taking care of us, arranging for us. . . . Anything we could hold on to, for instance, in an awful danger like to-night?”

“Does it matter what I think?”

“Yes, it does. Though you’re so much younger, you’re cleverer than me, in some ways. Juliet, I get so frightened! It may happen again. I can’t stand it. Don’t you think it was cruel and wicked of Roy to send me to a place where my life isn’t safe?”

“Well, perhaps if he’d known you minded the raids so much——”

“But you talk as if any one could *help* minding! When it might mean death!”

Juliet, lounging against the pillows, surveyed her with supreme detachment. She watched the faultless, insignificant profile, clear-cut against the moonlit window; the slight form, huddled in its silk draperies; the small clasped hands, twitching incessantly; the bosom stirred with short, uneven breaths. And a great curiosity took possession of her.

“Angela, would you tell me why you object so much to the idea of death?”

Angela stared at her pitiaibly.

“Doesn’t every one?”

“I don’t think I do. But any one who does ought to have a reason.”

“Why, it’s so obvious. Death stops things, doesn’t it?”

“Then there are things in your life that you want to have go on?”

“Of course. Aren’t there in every one’s?”

“Every one pretends there are. But seeing they’ve got to stop sometime——”

“It’s not only the things in one’s life, Juliet. It’s— one’s self.”

“You want *yourself* to go on?” The question came with a strange incisiveness, in Juliet’s young voice.

“Naturally. That more than anything. Of course, my

religion tells me that it would. But"—Angela shivered and hid her face—"I don't know how it would be—all alone. I'm so dependent on others—more than you are. I seem to need others to—to complete my personality."

Juliet, against her pillows, kept very still, conscious of a wild sympathy stirring beneath a cold stony pity. Her answer, given lightly, in no way expressed her.

"What sort of 'others'? Not Roy, I take it. Those men you had hanging round you at Winscote?"

Angela flinched.

"How did you know?" Her question was barely audible. "But it was one of them, chiefly."

"The black-haired creature with the narrow eyes."

"How could you guess?"

"I saw him look at you. I don't think, myself, that your personality would have gained much from him."

Angela's head bent lower.

"It's true," she murmured after a pause, "that he didn't really understand me."

"He understood you too well."

Angela lifted her head, and made a gesture of bewilderment.

"What do you mean? What did he understand too well? I don't altogether understand myself, so how could he——"

"You know what I mean. You knew it at the time. You tried to cover up."

The sharp relentless phrases, for the utterance of which Juliet could recognize no responsibility, seemed to affect Angela like physical blows. Dazed and *distract*, she moved a little on the bed, confronting the tense figure at the other end of it in helpless inquiry.

"Cover up? Cover up what?"

"Vacancy. Nothingness. Sheer, utter blank."

"S—something's happened to you," said Angela shakily. "Are your nerves upset? Shall we make some tea?"

"Why not, since there seems to be a sort of conspiracy

to keep it going—with tea and fried bacon and things like that?”

“Juliet, you seem to me very upset. I don’t even know what you’re talking about. We *were* talking about me.”

“So we are.”

“Then”—Angela’s tone was still uncannily free from anger—“did you mean it’s *me* that is vacant and blank?”

“Don’t you know it?”

And even as those words, apparently automatic like all her former speech, launched themselves from Juliet’s lips, they broke up, for an instant, the dead silence of the void; brought surprised and plaintive echoes about her: “Don’t you know it? Don’t you know it?”—echoes that trailed piteously away into nothing. Forgetful of Angela’s existence, she flung her head on the pillows.

The room had grown very cold; the moon was hidden, or set; no sound came from Juliet, none from Angela. All movement had long ceased on the floors below.

At last Angela sidled along the bed, feeling with her hand.

“Juliet! what are you doing? Where are you?”

It was a chilled and tremulous hand; but Juliet did not respond to its touch.

“Juliet, do say something! You’ve made me so creepy. I shall scream if you don’t . . .”

“I want to go to sleep.”

“Oh, but you mustn’t. You’re not undressed yet. And anyhow, you mustn’t—not till you’ve explained. You’ve been very rude, you know, and puzzled me very much. I’m not angry; but I must know what you meant. Juliet!”—the tinkling little voice suddenly caught itself on a sob—“I believe you hit on the very thing that makes me afraid in air-raids. I do feel as if—as if there was so little of me that I might get crushed out by mistake. Though I’m full of possibilities. . . . It’s only that—that I need some one—to help me become what I might be . . .”

Horrors! Angela’s arms were round her: an old night-

mare was fulfilling itself: Angela was beginning to "settle" on her.

Juliet heaved herself upright, in stormy resistance.

"It's not my job," she said fiercely. "It's Roy's."

"He doesn't do it," Angela answered, sobbing weakly. "No one does. I thought perhaps when I got among his people—my own sort of people—they would help me to find myself; but they all treated me as if I was worse than a nobody. I'm sure I don't know what will happen to me in the end. But there must have been some meaning in me being born. Don't even *you* think that, Juliet?"

Juliet, rigid, yet allowing herself to be clutched, stared into the darkness. Miss Tiverton's chimney stood out against it, a shade blacker than the night. It was very tricky, this void in which she existed. Echoes lost their way in it, and came striking back against the chimney: "Don't you know it?"

Suddenly the muscles of her arms relaxed, and she yielded a little to Angela's embrace. The movement was more than anything, a reciprocal confession of helplessness.

"Yes," she whispered. "I expect there was a meaning, for us both, once upon a time. But we can't see it, can we?"

"Can't you see for yourself either? I thought——"

"If I could see for myself, I expect I should see for you, and every one. Angela, you're horribly cold. Let's make tea, like you said."

CHAPTER XX

ANGELA LETHBRIDGE could not sustain life for many days together under the paternal roof; and hitherto her sister had been thankful that it was so; had, with undisguised relief, watched her periodical flutterings-forth to places unspecified, among friends picked up none knew exactly where; had dreaded the day when shortage of funds (it was generally that) should bring her back, sighing and complaining, to the bosom of her family. But on the next occasion after the air-raid of Angela's announcing that she was going away—to live with a grass-widowed friend in her London flat—Juliet demurred.

"You don't say why I shouldn't," Angela argued. "And there can't be a reason, if everything matters as little as you make out."

That seemed unanswerable. Juliet turned away, momentarily disconcerted. Her protest had been instinctive, and still she felt that there ought to be a reason why Angela shouldn't put herself at the mercy of an unscrupulous society that flattered and played with her and despised her, and would probably, when it was tired of her, amuse itself by pricking the bubble of her ridiculous existence. But you search for reasons, in a void, as vainly as for anything else. So Angela went; and Juliet, her days spent in ordering meals and reading the first and last pages of innumerable novels, hung on her in her thoughts with an anxiety, and even a sense of guilt, that were provoking because they seemed to have no rational basis. There would come, too before her mind's eye occasional glimpses of Cousin Maud—Cousin Maud in her more *farouche* aspect: she would see the square uncompromising figure, would meet the keen unavoidable gaze, and fancy herself accused. "You know your pretty sister's an even greater fool than you are," she would hear Cousin Maud saying. "It's up to you to look after her." And then in this imaginary inter-

view, she would feebly suggest that she wasn't responsible for her family. And Cousin Maud would raise her shaggy eyebrows and say—Oh, but it didn't matter what Cousin Maud would say: she belonged to a chapter that was closed.

Mrs. Simpson's ill-health had, undoubtedly, become something more than an intermittent pastime. That proved itself, in the first instance, by the fact that she not seldom withdrew from the foolish little recreations which had always been dear to her. She seemed to labor under a sense that any change of plan or break in routine needed better explanation than the simple: "I don't feel up to it, Juliet dear," and would sometimes look half ashamedly at her daughter as if it were a crime not to be well enough to amuse herself. She had also a curious obsession of fear lest Mr. Simpson should discover the truth; and, if it affected some plan in which his pleasure was involved, would invent any fib rather than confess to physical weakness. When it came, at last, to spending the greater part of each day in her room, she would plead headaches, or toothache, or neuralgia. As to the chaotic war-state of the household, she was admittedly at the end of her resources. Tears would not act as oil on those troubled waters: money would sometimes produce a brief lull between upheavals; but there was decidedly less money to deal with than there had been, and Mr. Simpson made himself very difficult about what there was. He entirely refused, for example, to buy a pianola for the express use of the staff. And he added to the trouble in a more positive manner. Nowadays, he had only two moods—abject depression alternating with noisy anger. Neither of these moods commended him to the staff (when there was one); so, if they could find no other excuse for leaving, there was always "the master." To Mrs. Simpson, lying wide-eyed and frightened on her couch, every footfall in the passage outside presaged a visit of complaint, followed by notice. She never grumbled nor lamented, even to Juliet: she would only remark, from time to time, with tears in her voice, that it was a great

mistake if people thought the fallen soldiers were the only victims of this cruel war—"look at poor dear father."

At last, submitting to the pressure of that surely foolish convention which decrees that things shall go on, Juliet took the household in hand. It might be a futile and a thankless task; but when she had established some kind of temporary working order, she was touched (a little resentfully, since she had no wish to feel) by her mother's surprise and overwhelming gratitude.

"My dear, it's like magic! I can't think how you do it. It must be something in your personality—something inherited from my people. Why, there's been no rudeness about lighting my bedroom fire since you said it was to be done. I can't thank you enough, Juliet—I really can't."

Juliet looked at her queerly.

"I don't see why you have to thank me, mother. It's my job, I suppose, while I'm here and you're not well."

"Yes, but the fact is, dear, I don't think I can do it as cleverly as you do even when I'm well. Of course, I've always had to work against odds, your father having such a special temperament, that servants don't understand. But I used to keep excellent servants, all the same. There was a girl I had once—Clara Fairbanks——"

"You didn't keep her, did you?" said Juliet.

"No, as it happened, she did leave. That was because she hadn't been used to the professional classes. But she and I got on beautifully together, while she stayed. She was very sorry about leaving, and even hinted, in the most delicate way, that she thought it was a pity I had married beneath me. Of course, there might be that point of view, though I've never taken it myself, and your father and I have always been devotedly happy. But it's very seldom that you find such a superior girl as Clara. And I sometimes think"—Mrs. Simpson furtively wiped away a tear—"I sometimes think that if you'd been grown up and able to manage like you do now, with your intimacy at Templewood House and all, you might have persuaded Clara to stay."

“I’d have found something better to waste my energies on,” Juliet said; and after jerkily arranging her mother’s pillows, she left the room.

What was to be done with people like her mother? You couldn’t be downright brutal, even for their good: besides, you had no idea what their good might happen to be, or whether there was for them any possibility of good at all.

During the first few months after her return, her father had taken as little notice of her as at any period of her life. Angela’s home-coming had been the more important, and the more pleasing, event. Angela was showy, and socially well-established: no one had hinted at any invidious reason for her seeking the shelter of his roof. But now, when Angela had gone away again, for an indefinite length of time, and when, moreover, a subtle change was beginning to be noticeable in the atmosphere of the house, Mr. Simpson, from the remote depths of his dejection, would be found gloomily surveying Juliet—across the dinner-table, perhaps, or over the top of his newspaper. He rarely spoke to her (except when the rage-mood was on), but he was undoubtedly taking stock of her. Sometimes, when his voice sounded morosely in her mother’s room, she fancied that he was discussing her, asking questions about her; and feared lest the plaintive gush that answered him might be a eulogy of her newly-discovered virtues. It seemed to her that it would be the last word in sordid calamity if her father should ever come to regard her as a daughter.

But his mind, weighted with grievances and anxieties, moved sluggishly in these days; and still, as the weeks dragged on, he recognized her only by moody watchings, and by a tendency to summon her rather than the servants should any hitch occur in the arrangements for his personal comfort.

Uneasy, and aggrieved at finding herself subject to sensations of life—anxiety, compassion, fear—when life, in

any true sense of the word, had apparently done with her, Juliet drew occasional relief from her visits to Olive.

Present intercourse with Olive had almost nothing in common with that of the old days. She had dreaded the first visit after her return from Cousin Maud's—dreaded Olive's eyes. But Olive's eyes were not upon her: they were ceaselessly following her noisy ubiquitous children, save when they rested for a moment, anxious and brooding, on the latest photograph of Harry in uniform. Nevertheless, whenever it was possible to sit still for five minutes and to hear the sound of her own voice, she would question Juliet, in a desultory preoccupied fashion, concerning home affairs, and Juliet would regale her with scraps of gossip—aware, as she did so, that her wits and her tongue had sharpened a good deal of late. Now and then Olive would laugh heartily; once, she remarked that Juliet's humor had got a tang to it, with a vengeance. But, if they observed changes in each other, they asked no questions. The superficial camaraderie apparently satisfied Olive; and it left Juliet free to practise the detached observation which had become her chief, perhaps her only, interest.

Olive, unlike the rest of the family, intrigued and baffled her. There was no clue to Olive. As you looked round on her squalid home (for the quartet had undoubtedly turned sordidness into squalor); as you watched her, dowdy and disheveled, coping single-handed with tasks that demanded a staff of servants for their proper execution; as you noted the absence of those little household amenities which, however insignificant in themselves, did at any rate bolster you up in the pretense of living; as you visualized for her a future in which things would probably get even worse before they got better, if they ever did—as you surveyed, impartially, the lot that Olive had made for herself, you simply could not concede to her any excuse for happiness. True, she might tell you that she loved Harry and loved the children: very likely she believed it. But it seemed obvious that in circumstances like these the so-called love must have degenerated into that

mere instinctive fidelity which an animal has for its mate and its young. There was never anything nowadays in Olive's words or actions to suggest that her married life retained for her the smallest glimmer of romance. She put forward no extravagant claims for her offspring, and tended "the kids" with a kind of slap-dash efficiency induced by her chronic condition of hurry. Even her glances at Harry's photograph were usually connected with some allusion to "their father," which seemed to imply a practical rather than a sentimental anxiety. One day Juliet asked her if she ever sang now. "Bless you, no!" Olive answered. "As if there wasn't enough babel in the house without me lifting up my voice!" But, search as you would, you could find in her no trace of discontent. You might take the view that she had been dragged beneath the level of aspirations and desires; but somehow she did not give the impression of a submerged personality. You felt that she was still, potentially, the Olive who once would have turned the world upside down in order to get what she wanted; that, despite her deplorable appearance and environment, she had remained mistress of her fate; that the reason she asked nothing of anybody was simply that she had nothing to ask.

To Juliet it began, at last, to look like obstinate complacency; and she grew irritated. Now and then, an involuntary impulse of cruelty would set her wishing that something might happen to knock the bottom out of this outrageous life of Olive's: it would seem (especially in nerve-racking hours of wakefulness at night) a matter of cosmic importance that Olive should cease to find happiness where happiness was not.

Something did happen, in the late spring of that year. While Juliet, with bored obligingness, was drying the younger twin and Olive sponging the elder, a telegram came with the news that Harry had been killed in action. But if this knocked the bottom out of Olive's life, no one knew it.

Olive finished sponging the twin, put both the babies into their cots, and laid their grubby rag dolls in their arms. She did not ask Juliet to stay with her, but thanked her for her small services, and gave her a kiss. Juliet, for her part, was conscious of words struggling for utterance; but they died on her lips. Olive was much too far away to be spoken to; but not through being submerged . . .

When Juliet let herself out into the street, she was frightened. Some defense had been, at least momentarily, torn away from her—perhaps, the caustic criticism with which she was now accustomed to parry all thrusts of human feeling. For the moment, she felt herself completely at their mercy. She remembered, even seemed to be hearing again, the sound of Olive's singing as it had once, long ago, reached her on this very pavement; and, hearing it as it were through the silence of Olive, which lay so heavy about her, she realized with absolute conviction that the singing of that day and the silence of this were equally expressions of a being that had suffered no change. And as, in her childhood, she had asked herself, perplexed and affronted, how Olive dared sing so joyously, now she asked herself, in an agony of bewildered self-pity, how Olive could dare to keep silence—a silence of which you knew, if you knew nothing else, that it was not the silence of the void.

Olive could not change her abode, for, in those days of house shortage, there was nowhere else to go to. But without resources over and above Harry's small savings and her widow's pension, neither could she afford the rent of her present home. She decided to let her top floors. Mr. Simpson made, for a time, no move; but he glowered at Juliet, across the dinner-table, more pertinaciously than ever, as if he discerned, and resented, her quiet scorn. She learned, after a few weeks, that he had offered his widowed daughter an allowance of fifty pounds a year.

"I hope you slammed the door in his face," Juliet said.

"Not at all," Olive answered calmly. "I can't afford to slam the door on fifty pounds a year."

"Olive! I'd rather work my fingers to the bone than take it."

"Well, I do work my fingers to the bone."

"But it's a downright insult."

"I don't think it's meant to be. I believe he'd do more if he could afford it."

"If he could *afford* it! What on earth do you mean?"

"He's been hard hit by the war, for one thing. And for another, I believe Leslie's draining him all the time."

Juliet shrugged her shoulders.

"Very likely. But if he's as poor as all that he's no business to hang on at Ashtree Towers. The upkeep of it isn't exactly cheap, I fancy—to say nothing of registry fees for servants every half-hour. There's no sense in it."

"I dare say not. But since when have we begun to look for strict logic in that quarter?"

Juliet turned away impatiently, and pulled at the incongruous gold tassel on a horse-hair cushion.

"I can't understand you nowadays, Olive. You seem to take everything, even father, lying down."

"Things jar less if you do."

"That's not your reason."

Olive laughed a little.

"Perhaps I have a feeling, as I get older, that we're all lying down together—in the soup."

"In fact," Juliet said, with a faint sneer, "you're learning to be charitable."

"I don't know, I'm sure, my dear. I don't think much about names for things—there isn't time."

"Well, answer one question:"—Juliet had dropped her sneer, and spoke very slowly, twisting the tassel about in her fingers—"Has there been anything special in your life that gave you a different point of view? Because you are different. Was it—forgive me, but was it Harry?" She had tried, but knew that she had failed, to keep the inflection of that last word toneless. She flushed in embarrassment. Olive's eyes shot out one of their shrewdest glances: almost imperceptibly, she smiled.

"Does it seem to you impossible that it should have been?"

"Quite," said Juliet, with sudden desperate frankness. "I don't mean Harry personally—but what he has stood for."

"Only," answered Olive very gently, "you don't happen to know what he has stood for, do you?"

"Don't I?" Juliet said, wondering; and, involuntarily, she swept with her gaze the drab poverty-stricken room.

"You know the surface part, of course."

"Is there anything else? If there is, surely I ought to be able to see just a glimpse of it."

"Yes," said Olive gravely, "I think you ought. And I think you would have done, once. But I don't really feel anxious about you, little Juliet. You're young still."

Juliet started, sat bolt upright and stared at her sister with mingled suspicion and resentment.

"Anxious—about me! What *can* you mean? I should have thought I was the one member of the family who could be trusted not to cause anxiety—to keep out of the soup, as you would elegantly put it. At least I've got eyes in my head."

"No doubt," Olive rejoined dryly. "But you don't seem, just at present, to have got any anywhere else."

One day in the summer, when Juliet, having been let in by the charwoman, made her way to Olive's living-room, she heard through the half-open door a voice that had grown unfamiliar. It was long since she had come across Leslie: his visits to Ashtree Towers were few and far between, and, since her return from Cousin Maud's, she had always missed him, by chance or design. Standing on the outside of the door, uncertain whether to go in, she realized in a moment that Leslie was agitated and Olive, as usual, calm. Not having any particular objection to meeting him in somebody else's house, she decided to make her presence known; and even as she crossed the threshold, there came from the tall weedy figure in khaki, who stood by the

window with his back to her, an outburst that aroused her interest.

“It’s not my fault that I didn’t go and jolly well get killed in this damned war!”

Olive, who was sitting hunched up on the sofa, doggedly mending socks, looked at the door and said:

“Hallo, Juliet!”

Leslie swung round. Juliet’s interest deepened at sight of his face. What on earth had happened to him? she wondered. He had once been handsome, in a trivial sort of way; and had worn, more often than not, an expression of jaunty impudence. Certainly, she had sometimes found a lurking suggestion of the whipped puppy in his demeanor; but now he looked as if dodging the whip had been his sole occupation through a long period of strenuous days and sleepless nights. He didn’t, however, allow much time for her inspection: he brushed past her without a word, and left the room. Olive, with a murmur of excuse, followed him, and nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before she returned.

“Sorry I interrupted,” said Juliet casually from the window, whence she had seen Leslie depart—with a step more precise than of old, thanks to military training, but with bent head and an ignominious air of wanting to keep himself out of sight.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Olive answered. “As I pointed out to him, you’ll have to know, and the sooner the better. *I* can’t be of any real use to him. He got into the habit of bringing his scrapes here when Harry was alive; he liked Harry, on the subject of horses. But even then we’d nothing to give but good advice. That won’t help now, and I’m afraid it’s up to you to do what you can.”

“Up to me! My dear Olive, I refuse entirely to have anything to do with Leslie’s low scrapes.”

“Oh—you can’t,” said Olive shortly. “Whatever may be our defects as a family, we don’t wash our hands of one another like that.”

Juliet sank down on the sofa, aghast and deeply angry.

It appeared that Fate had a malignant conspiracy against her; that it was determined to drag her out of such refuge as she had found in the void—to force her back into relation even with the more actively obnoxious members of her family. Hadn't she already suffered enough through being a Simpson?

"Of course," Olive went on meditatively, "you may not be able to do anything. It's the usual question, you see, of getting father to put his hand into his pocket. He'll have to put it in pretty deep this time: Leslie's been and gone and done it. Some creature is threatening to sue him for breach of promise, and as far as I can gather she'd get her case, and there'd be the devil to pay. The thing *must* be staved off."

"Why?"

"My dear child, the details don't make a very pretty story, and Leslie would be done for."

"Wasn't he done for," Juliet asked with a cold glint of anger in her voice, "the moment he was born?"

"That's a kindly view to take! He's a terrible little ass, I grant you, and his morals leave much to be desired. But, as Harry used to say, there's been a lot against him. We none of us had any upbringing, did we? And then, this army life—it's not been good for him. The war might possibly have made a man of him if he'd gone out, but he was deprived of even that chance."

"And what am I supposed to do toward wiping up the present mess?"

"Well, you're on the spot, and you'll have to do all you humanly can to bring father up to scratch. After all, I think you must have some influence, if you choose to exert it. The stability of the house depends on you—and you bet he knows it. If there really isn't enough money available, then you'll have to raise the point you discussed with me a little while back, and urge him to sell Ashtree Towers."

"That's all very well! For the sake of you and the children, he ought to do it. But for Leslie! Why, if we

had one room in Camden Town, Leslie would squeeze us out of it.”

“You can never tell,” said Olive mildly. “The lesson may have gone home, this time.”

“And what about mother? Oughtn’t we to consider her?”

“I *am* considering her—quite as much as Leslie. A scandal about him would half kill her. Do your best, for her sake, Juliet, if you can’t manage to be inspired by sisterly devotion.”

Juliet, walking home, combated more than one impulse to walk somewhere, anywhere, else. The sense of outrage was strong upon her; but even more intolerable was the sense of impotence. It ought to have been possible to refuse a part in this puppet-show (so far as she was concerned, it could be no more than that), and to remain passive in the void. But, apparently, resistance had died out of her with everything else—except the power to observe. She had become a thing so light, so empty, that she couldn’t even negatively assert herself against a human will. Nevertheless, it might be amusing to watch her father crumple up over the prospect of having to leave Ashtree Towers. He didn’t want to leave Ashtree Towers, while Miss Tiverton remained next door: it would upset him as much as it would upset a vulture to be forcibly removed from its grim vigil. Oh, yes, there was no doubt that she could manage her father, since Olive had galvanized her into a spurious vitality.

Her homeward way took her down Grange Gardens. At one point she slowed her pace. There was no longer a length of high wall with wrought-iron gates let into it, but a neat railing, and, immediately behind it, a row of callow evergreen shrubs. Behind that, was a sweep of gravel, leading up to the red-and-yellow block of flats which stood more or less on the site of the old house—good, practical dwellings, and much more sanitary than the old house

could have been, for there were no trees left to shut out the light and air. Unfortunately, they didn't pay as well as they should; but there they were in all their hideousness—doubtless beloved of her father as a triumphant piece of self-expression, and as an earnest of what he would do when a certain old woman relinquished her hold upon him.

Juliet, with a shrug, passed on. Was it perhaps fun for the old lady to be tethering Mr. Simpson on the frail thread of her own attenuated life?

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN she took her place, that night, at one end of the dinner-table, she was more alert, more conscious of her personality, than usual. There had been infused into her an uncanny exhilaration that simulated the sense and enjoyment, of power. She had even taken an interest in dressing for dinner—her head poised loftily as she brushed and coiled her dark hair, her figure tense and erect as she stood before the long glass fastening a rose into the folds of her white gown. She had gone down-stairs with a light sure step, humming softly as she went. And when her father poked his head round the drawing-room door to see if she were there, she put aside her magazine with the curt remark that dinner had been waiting for ages.

Over the soup-tureen, he began to glower at her more blatantly than ever; but Juliet, instead of dropping her eyes and trying to forget him, returned the stare with a quiet determination not to be outdone in this matter of scrutiny. There was now a practical reason for taking the measure of his mental and moral disorders, in so far as physiognomy would reveal them; and Mr. Simpson's physiognomy was sufficiently expressive, when observed with an attentive eye. Very soon, however, he bent so low over his plate that she could see little but reddened cheeks and the deepening lines of a scowl.

After dinner, she betook herself to a hammock-chair on the terrace. The midsummer night was warm and fragrant: there were the usual queer noises of brown owls in neighboring trees: the evening star swelled with glory against a fading opalescence: moths came fanning around her, sometimes giving her a secret touch. . . . And for the moment she was disturbed, as by a confused sense of something mysterious that approached her, felt about her, sought response. It troubled her; so she listened, not to the owls, but, with a kind of zest, to certain far-off sounds

of human activity—the hooting of motor-cars, the cry of a newsboy announcing some crisis in the war. She looked at nothing but the point of her pretty shoe, moving it mechanically this way and that, as a temporary outlet for energy.

A slinking footstep sounded on the gravel behind her. She turned, to see Leslie at her elbow. He was glancing apprehensively to right and left.

“Well, what about it?” he said in a low tone. “Have you got the old boy into leading-strings?”

“I don’t understand. You’ve not had your row yet?”

“No, of course not. I hope there won’t be one. Olive said you’d see to it.”

“Oh, really? I didn’t gather I was to do it *all*. I thought you’d make just a beginning!”

“For pity’s sake, talk lower. So you haven’t even prepared him?”

“Not even prepared him,” Juliet assented lightly. “How does one prepare a person? Olive didn’t tell me.”

“Aren’t you going to help?” Leslie demanded in a savage whisper.

“Oh dear, yes! I’m all obligingness. I’ll go to him now.”

She got up, stretched her arms lazily and rearranged her gauze scarf.

“It’s a question of money, isn’t it?” she asked blandly. “How much shall I say?”

Leslie stood motionless, his hands behind him. In the starlight, she could see that his eyes were fixed on her; but she failed to read their expression. Suddenly he turned on his heel.

“You’re no good,” he said; and before she could answer, he had vanished into the house.

She felt as if she had been slapped in the face. The slap didn’t hurt, exactly, but it tingled. An experience so new, so unexpected, left her uncertain whether to laugh or be angry. Finally she laughed—a low laugh that held, perhaps, just a hint of discomfiture.

She sat down again, gathered the scarf about her shoulders, and waited, and listened. If Leslie had really gone headlong to their father with his unpleasant story, she would soon know it: the open library window was but a few feet away.

She heard voices, rising and falling: the train must have been fired, but the explosion was a long time coming.

At last there was silence; then, muffled and far away, the sound of the front door closing.

She still sat there, vaguely disappointed. She had been so ready—so energetic; and now it seemed that there was nothing for her to do. Since there had been no explosion, she wouldn't even have to put pieces together.

After a time, she heard the crunch of gravel, and, looking up, noticed movement on the path under Miss Tiverton's wall. She could just discern a human figure; then, as it advanced along the path, coming into the light of the rising moon, she saw her father clearly. Massive and clumsy, he walked with a curious gait, as if his feet were too small and unsteady to carry him. His head was bent, and the moonlight seemed to concentrate on its baldness, and on the big hands clasped behind him. He kept glancing at the wall: sometimes he would pause uncertainly in his heavy progress. At last he turned aside on to the lawn, and began clambering up the steps of his belvedere. There he let himself down on to one of the benches, hunched up his shoulders, folded his arms, and remained motionless, facing the angle at which Miss Tiverton's wall met the Grange field. Juliet, behind him, could see nothing but the hunched shoulders and the bald patch that still seemed to intrigue the irreverent moonbeams. And there came upon her an impulse of laughter.

Her father's little tragedies were so desperately comic: she could never stop laughing while he went on sitting perched up in the belvedere—brooding and glowering, no doubt, over the one big grievance which, in the disorder of his brain, would seem to him to be the root-cause of all his other troubles, small and great. She saw now, per-

haps for the first time, how strongly superstition had entered into his regard of Miss Tiverton. Miss Tiverton had probably always been to him an opposing force rather than a mere obstacle; but now he would have discovered in her his evil genius. Doubtless it was to her, that, in the obscure twistings of his mind, he attributed the Land Act, the war, and any other circumstances which might have conspired to the break-down of his one-time prosperity. This scrape of Leslie's would appear to him to be her doing rather than his son's; and he was surely much less occupied at this moment with anger against Leslie than with an insane resolve to break Miss Tiverton before she broke him. But—he was so ludicrously helpless! The worst he could do was to sit hunched in his belvedere, with the moonlight mocking his bald head.

She learned a few days later, through Olive, that Leslie had been bought off and the scandal averted. For some weeks, her father's dejection lay over him like a pall—too heavy, apparently, for even rage to displace. She wondered, and to some extent regretted, that he should not have attacked her on the subject of Leslie: it was really rather galling to have no occasion for the exercise either of her wits or of what Olive called her "influence." Moreover, little as she desired intercourse with him for its own sake, she was being piqued at being thus ignored in a family crisis about which she might have had something to say. And at times, when her mood verged on morbidity, she would find herself considering various circumstances—Angela's disregard of her advice, Olive's not asking her to stay after the news of Harry's death, her father's silence now when he had a genuine grievance; and would discover in them a voiceless echo of Leslie's curt: "*You're no good.*"

But she never allowed such moods to endure: they were obviously unjustifiable in so far as they implied the least shadow of self-reproach. Of course, she wasn't any good, to the Simpsons. Who could be?

In the autumn of that year, when peace was in sight, she noticed faint stirrings of the pall under which her father had his being. Still it was not rage that moved it, but an awakened interest—in something yet to be declared. One morning, he bustled off to his office to keep an appointment: a day or two later, he received a visitor, whom he conducted, first down the garden to look over the wall, and then round into the Grange premises. Juliet, watching them from the garden as they strolled along the field, noticed the same gesticulations and glancings at the air which, in her childhood, she had learned to associate with “business” visits to the Grange.

After this, her father took to haunting his belvedere; but nowadays he would climb the steps jauntily, and his back view would be decidedly complacent. He formed the habit, also, of drawing little plans absent-mindedly—on the margin of his newspaper at breakfast, in the corner of the *menu* at dinner.

At last Juliet put a question.

“Are you going to build something on the Grange field?” she asked pleasantly.

He looked at her with suspicion.

“Of course I shall make use of the land, as soon as the war’s over.”

“But you can’t do much that’s profitable, can you, unless the peace kills Miss Tiverton?”

“Profitable, eh?” Mr. Simpson repeated. “Well, profit isn’t the only thing.”

“I should have thought it was the first consideration. You’ve had such heavy losses and expenses, haven’t you?”

Mr. Simpson glared.

“Who asked you to mind my business for me?”

“Oh, no one. But I can’t help wondering about it sometimes. I try to prepare myself for our having to leave this house.”

Mr. Simpson jerked his chair violently back from the table. His face had a vicious, but at the same time a hunted, look.

"Leave this house! Who said anything about leaving this house?"

"Well, you've cut the housekeeping allowance rather fine, haven't you? And you can give Olive only fifty pounds a year."

"Who said it was all I could give her? Suppose it's all I think fit to give her, Young Impertinence?"

"I should be sorry to think that of you," Juliet answered tranquilly. "I prefer to think it's all you can afford."

"Well, and if I *am* hard hit, whose fault is that?"

"Miss Tiverton's, of course. It couldn't be anybody else's."

The words fell lightly and spontaneously from her lips, that curved, with the utterance, into a faintly satirical smile. She was startled, even dismayed, at their instantaneous effect. Her father's eyes, meeting hers, were like Angela's when they had met the eyes of the man who saw through her; only, if possible, more primitively, more desperately, defensive. If there were vacancy at the center of Angela's being, there was something positive at the center of her father's—something that had a still greater need of being hidden. There was an obsession. And she had discovered it; and therefore he must get away from her. He lifted himself heavily out of his chair and left the room. No doubt (as she reflected irrelevantly) it was the first time in his life that he had omitted to finish a meal.

But she remained at the table, gazing at his empty place; growing, each moment, colder and more fixed in her immobility.

Her mother, she found later, was informed as to Mr. Simpson's mysterious projects; and her mother was worried.

"Just before the war," Mrs. Simpson explained, "your dear father was approached by one of the biggest motor manufacturing companies about a site for repairing-works. Of course, he had various sites to offer, but he thought the

Grange field would be suitable, and so did they. When the war came, their scheme fell through. Now, it seems, they're beginning to negotiate with him again. But I can't help thinking, though of course I know nothing whatever about it, that the Grange field isn't really *very* suitable."

"Motor-repairing works," Juliet said reflectively. "It seems a little short-sighted. Surely it must lessen the value of all his residential property round here?"

"Oh, well, as to that," her mother answered, "he has sold a good many of the houses in Ashtree Avenue—all those with gardens backing on the field. He began selling a long while ago, with a view to this."

"With a view to these motor-works?" Juliet repeated incredulously.

"Yes, dear: it was such a wise thing to do. Your father is an excellent man of business, and it's no fault of his, I'm sure, if he's had a lot of disappointments and difficulties lately. You see, he mightn't have gone on getting such good rents for these houses, with anything so noisy as motor-works in the immediate neighborhood."

Juliet's face was expressionless.

"And have you yourself any idea," she asked (suddenly curious in regard to her mother), "why he was so anxious for the motor-works?"

"Well, you know, dear, he can't develop the land as he wished to, in Miss Tiverton's life-time; and she doesn't seem to die, does she? So he thought this would be a good way of using it. I believe the government did make him an offer—for something to do with the war: I forget what. But your father wished to keep free for the motor-works. There's nothing against them, you see, in the covenant: motors weren't invented when the covenant was drawn up."

It was some time before Juliet spoke again.

"And what about his big scheme?" she asked. "The scheme for developing the Grange estate with Miss Tiverton's, when she dies?"

"But as I say," Mrs. Simpson answered plaintively,

"she *doesn't* die. However, I think your father might have gone on waiting a little, even after the war's over, if it hadn't been for what I think it is."

"What do you think it is?"

"Mind you, Juliet, I don't know anything about it. But I've got a dreadful feeling that perhaps he is even poorer than he says. I think it's possible that even if Miss Tiverton ever did die, he wouldn't have enough capital, or whatever you call it, to carry out his original plan. I think he thinks it's really better to sell the land for motor-works. But you must never say I said so. I've noticed just lately that he doesn't like any allusion to his losses. Once I suggested that perhaps we'd better live in a smaller house——"

"You did? And what happened?"

"Your father was terribly upset at me thinking he couldn't afford to keep a roof over our heads—at least, that's how he put it, though it wasn't quite what I meant. But, anyhow, I dare say he'll get a nice little bit of money out of the motor people. Only I can't help wishing it was something different—not motor-works."

"Why do you wish that, mother?"

"Well, you see, dear, it will be rather noisy—much worse than Miss Calthrop's girls. And noisier for us than for the people farther down the road. I fancy they go on working quite late, sometimes, in that sort of place. I dread it a little bit for myself, for I do lie awake rather, as it is—only you must never say anything like that to father. But I dread it more for him. You know how it upsets him to have his sleep disturbed. I remember, years and years ago, we had a great trouble with Miss Tiverton's cat . . ."

"And now," Juliet said quietly, "Miss Tiverton will have a great trouble with our motor-works."

"Why, yes"—Mrs. Simpson was interested, but a trifle anxious—"now you come to mention it, I suppose she will. I never thought of that."

"Father did," Juliet remarked impassively. There had

been no temptation to say it with bitterness or scorn: since her brief passage with her father the other night, she had acquired a certain distaste for her own insight into other people's minds.

Mrs. Simpson looked distressed.

"Well, I wonder . . . He *may* have thought of it: he thinks of most things. But that wouldn't have been his reason for wanting the motor-works—oh, no! of course, it wouldn't. Still, it does seem to be another argument against them. I don't like to think of that poor old lady not being able to sleep. She's been very trying to your father; but still, it's a dreadful thing not to be able to sleep. Juliet, dear, if you agree with me, do you think you could influence your father?"

"No, mother, I'm afraid not."

"But why? You know, dear, he has a respect for you. He may not have said anything, but he does appreciate the way you've been managing for us. His shaving water is always hot now, and he finds the cooking wonderfully improved. I really think he would listen to what you said."

"I can't say anything, mother. I'm—not in touch with him."

"Not in touch with him? When you have breakfast and dinner with him every day?"

"We do sit at the same table. But in spite of that we live in different worlds."

Her mother gazed at her in dire bewilderment.

"In different worlds? I'm afraid, dear, I don't quite take your meaning."

"Don't bother to try. Tell me"—Juliet was surprised at the question that rose to her lips: it came so abruptly, so independently of any previous thought—"does Mr. Townley know about all this?"

"He knew about the original offer, before the war. He didn't want it to be closed with. But, of course, ever since he joined up, your poor dear father has had to rely entirely on his own judgment."

CHAPTER XXII

ON Armistice Day Juliet, with Olive and Olive's elder boy, drove about London in her father's car. She had no purpose in doing so, except to oblige Olive; and she wondered, for a time, what Olive's purpose might be. As they pulled up in one of the innumerable traffic blocks, surrounded on all hands by a roaring, dancing, flag-waving mob, glorying in its temporary loss of reason, Olive, her eyes filled with a misty glow, lifted the child and placed him, standing, on her knee.

"I wanted little Harry to see and hear it all," she explained. "He was too young to realize the war; but he'll remember this, and it may help him, afterward, to understand."

Juliet's head drooped a little.

"I expect you're right. But to me, the whole thing's rather depressing. I—I'm afraid I didn't realize the war, either."

"That would be because you hadn't anybody in it. And yet"—Olive, setting the child down again as they moved on, looked at her sidewise, and spoke gently—"and yet, hadn't you, perhaps? I've sometimes wondered——"

"The Armistice," she said levelly, "means absolutely nothing to me."

"Oh, not that surely—in any case?" Olive protested in a troubled voice. "Even if we didn't *feel* anything, if we had no personal stake in it (as I haven't, now), we must know that it's one of the grandest moments in the world's history."

"Perhaps. But the world's history doesn't appeal to every one. I dare say little Harry's sons won't feel any particular emotion when they read in some history primer that the Great War came to an end on the eleventh of November, nineteen hundred and eighteen."

The car was stopped again. Close by, in the shelter of

an archway, stood a frail, bent old woman in rusty black, smiling tremulously, as if she had forgotten how to do it, and at the same moment dabbing at her eyes with a torn, grimy handkerchief. Olive watched her for a second or two.

"Oh, Juliet," she said rather shakily, "can't you see that there's a glory in life—apart from our own individual lives?"

"I see," said Juliet in a low voice, "that some people—even old people—still think there is."

"Still?" said Olive. But no explanation was forthcoming.

Their homeward way took them near the flat where Angela was living. Olive suggested that they might look her up.

"I wonder," she mused aloud, "just what the Armistice means to Angela."

"Nothing very thrilling, I'm afraid; nor even very pleasant."

Olive sighed.

"I've a lot to blame myself for. Dear me, what an unprincipled fool I was in the old days!"

"Not a fool. It was rather clever to hook Roy for her."

"Yes, well, you've a right to be sarcastic," Olive answered, flushing.

"But, indeed, I'm not sarcastic! It *was* clever; and, with your ideas about family duty, it must have seemed the right and kind thing to do."

"Well, anyhow, I'm very much afraid I've spoiled two lives."

"I don't know anything about Roy," said Juliet meditatively. "But I can't see why you should think you've spoiled Angela's. What was there, really, to spoil?"

"You have me there," Olive admitted, with a faint unwilling grin. "I can only say that there might possibly have been some man created specially for her."

Angela was at home. They were shown into a small, exotic-looking room, that reeked with the smoke of scented cigarettes. Little Harry sniffed impolitely, and remarked that he thought he was going to be sick.

"Oh, not in here!" wailed Angela, pausing half-way in the act of rising from a sofa. "Marie would be so cross."

"It'll be all right if you don't mind opening the window," said Olive briskly. "May I?"

"Yes, I suppose so, if you must." Angela shivered, and threw a wrap over her transparent gown. "It's a horrid damp day, but what I mind most is the awful noise."

"But it's so exciting," said Olive, coming to the fire after she had established her son by the open window. "We've been driving all through it. Haven't you been out?"

"No, of course I haven't. Marie—my friend, you know—went to lunch at the Ritz. But my nerves won't stand it. Oh, hark at the cat-calling out there!"

"Don't you want to cat-call yourself, now the fighting's over?"

Angela had retired to the sofa. Gracefully posed against black-and-gold cushions, with her painted face in shadow, she looked strangely at her sisters.

"Of course, one's glad for it to be over. It's been a dreadful war. But—but making all this noise can't undo the harm that's been done, can it?"

"That it can't," Olive answered very quietly. "However," she added, "there's no reason why one shouldn't rejoice for the men who *are* left to come home, and for their families."

"Some people think," said Angela nervously, "that there's bound to be a lot of trouble when they do come. In all sorts of ways—even in family life. What they say is, that conditions have been so different during the war, and the men won't understand."

Olive stretched her long legs in front of her, and warmed her toes at the fire.

"You and Juliet are a pretty pair," she remarked.

“Here’s Juliet been reducing the Armistice to a couple of lines in a history primer thirty years hence, and you half regretting the peace because it may lead to domestic misunderstandings.”

Nobody answered her. Juliet, who had not spoken at all, slowly raised her eyes: they met Angela’s, across Olive’s solid challenging form. In Juliet’s lurked the rueful ghost of a smile: Angela’s, from the window, threw to her a wavering appeal.

Juliet looked away, embarrassed. She was half ashamed of this understanding which had come to pass between them.

“Do you suppose,” she said, when, after driving some way in silence, they neared Olive’s home, “that there’s anything seriously wrong?”

“I think she has a reason for dreading Roy’s return. But, somehow, I don’t think it’s the reason that any one would naturally expect. She’s always had one thing to set against her folly, and that’s her innate respectability!”

“Respectability? I see.” Juliet laughed a little. “Yes, perhaps it is there, though I never thought of looking for it, behind the paint and all. But surely nothing in Angela could be strong enough to keep her from being curled round anybody’s little finger?”

“It’s questionable, certainly,” Olive admitted. “But I think her safeguard may be that, when it comes to the point, men—that is, men of the brand her Marie affects—don’t much want to curl respectability round their little fingers.”

Roy Lethbridge wrote that his battalion did not expect to be demobilized at an early date; but Angela, soon after the Armistice, returned to her father’s house.

The burdens on that house were heavier than when she had left it in the early spring; for Mrs. Simpson, though, uncharacteristically, she refused the attendance of doctors, had become obviously unable to leave her room; and

the ending of the war did nothing, immediately, toward restoring possibilities of domestic comfort. Juliet's hands were full: she could not exactly welcome her sister, who brought back with her an atmosphere of moral invalidism that proved, in subtle ways, more disintegrating to the household than her mother's physical ill-health. Wherever Juliet went, whatever she did, Angela seemed always to be hovering at her elbow, in a state of pathetic, mute appeal. But the appeal would not formulate itself in response to the businesslike questions which were all that Juliet could find time for, just now.

"I *should* like a talk with you some time," Angela would say wistfully. "Perhaps one night when we're going to bed . . ."

"I'm too sleepy then," Juliet would answer. It was true, she did get tired nowadays; but it was also true that she had no intention of committing herself to midnight talks with Angela. She knew that she couldn't help.

So Angela wandered about, sighing and restless, mislaying her own possessions and other people's, wasting the servants' time, even irritating Mr. Simpson, whose pride in her looks and social position could not altogether endure the strain of unpunctuality at meals, left-open doors, muddled-up newspapers, scented cigarettes, and the pungent floral essence that haunted Angela's person. Sometimes she would take suddenly to her bed—with a deprecating air of wishing to give less trouble than she did when she was up.

On one of these occasions, when Juliet went into her room to ask her what she had done with the telephone directory, Angela, lying under a litter of newspapers, greeted her with unwonted animation. (Apparently she did not hear Juliet's question.)

"There's a name you know in the obituary," she said excitedly. "Wounded a few days before the Armistice, and died since. Captain Bruce Sadler . . ."

"Where is the directory?" Juliet persisted.

Why should she feel anything? It was not her fault that she had no feeling. It was, for ever and for ever, Bruce's fault. Why shouldn't he bear the brunt of it, especially now he was dead?

Bruce, playing the piano; Bruce, fanning her with a dock leaf; Bruce, climbing a hill path with the help of his crutch; Bruce, in an autumn wood, gazing through cigarette smoke at the setting sun; Bruce, groping his silent way downward, with his hand reverently on her arm. . . .

Bruce, through a tense period of uneasy, intermittent, yet always vital companionship, half seeing, half wanting, half daring; and, finally, unheroic—dragged back, by influences that had always been opposed to her, into the slavery of his social traditions. . . .

Bruce, escaped on to the plane of the elemental; true, of his own will, to his simplest tradition, patriotism: dead of wounds. Another, a more living Bruce . . .

Juliet's face was hidden in her hands; and at last, between her fingers, slowly but determinedly, came tears.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT WAS New Year's Eve when Mr. Townley reappeared. Juliet came upon him in Ashtree Avenue, making his way to her father's house. For a moment she was startled, by a sensation—not wholly desirable—of years being wiped out. He seemed, at first glance, utterly unchanged. She found herself looking for the familiar roll of papers under his arm; and she could have vowed that his gray suit was precisely the same gray suit that he had worn when she last saw him—and, indeed, every time that she had ever seen him. His square muscular figure had always had a soldierly bearing: his slight mustache had conformed pretty nearly to the military pattern: she could not remember him without patches of grizzled hair above his temples; and his healthy out-of-doors complexion was now only bronzed a shade or two deeper. Aware that he had won distinctions implying contact with the worst horrors of war, she sought in his face some record of these experiences; but there was nothing to be read in it except good-humor with the world, and an eager, if rather shy, pleasure in this meeting with her. His eyes—eyes which, in her childhood, used to impress her as having “collected things”—had not lost their old trick of half hiding themselves in a network of puckers; so it was difficult to discover whether they had collected anything more.

“I *am* glad to see you,” Juliet said. The speech was spontaneous and perfectly sincere, though, even as she made it, she wondered that it should be so; for it seemed a very long time since she had been genuinely glad to see any one.

“Well, that's nice of you, Miss Juliet. To tell the truth, as I came along Grange Gardens just now, I said to myself that I couldn't expect much of a welcome from *you*.”

“But—why not?” Juliet asked. Then, observing the

twinkle in his eye as he stood holding open the gate for her, she laughed.

"You mean that you felt guilty about those exquisite red-and-yellow flats."

"Well, yes—though I'm not responsible for the fabric. But seeing the rating I once had about some little sticks——"

"Certainly, time has fulfilled your prophecy of there being worse to come. But you're not the only person who can prophesy truly. Our neighbor still exists."

"And your romance about her, Miss Juliet? Does that still exist?"

She was astonished—even a little angry: what had this to do with Mr. Townley? Then she remembered that in the old days he had been, if only partly and accidentally, in her confidence.

"Romance?" she said. "Yes, I did make stories about her when I was a child. But now, I think, it's my father who finds romance in Miss Tiverton, though possibly of a different kind. She stands for a great deal, to my father."

"I believe you," said Mr. Townley sympathetically. "Thorns in the flesh do seem to get bigger, the longer they stay in. But where's the romance?"

"Well, isn't it romance when you see mysterious powers where there aren't any—even if it's powers for evil?"

"Maybe," Mr. Townley answered dubiously. "But as you say, it's a different kind of romance from what yours was."

"I'm not *sure* about that," said Juliet evenly. "Perhaps it's only a question of the point of view. If a thing isn't anything in itself, it can be turned by any one into whatever's wanted."

"But everything's something in itself," Mr. Townley announced cheerfully, "better or worse."

Juliet gasped.

"How pleasant, to be so cocksure!"

"Only way to get on with life," he commented blandly.

"But—aren't there *any* problems, even for you? For

instance, if you found something that seemed to be real for good and evil at the same time?"

"Lots of things do look like that at first," he conceded unexpectedly. "Very often it means you want to give them a hitch—get them into the right light. Then the evil doesn't seem to be more a part of them than a smut is part of your nose, or the shadow under your hat-brim part of your face."

"Or—the good might not seem to be more a part of them than sunlight making a white patch on something black."

Mr. Townley looked baffled for a moment.

"Well, anyhow," he said, "sunlight doesn't disguise forms. Get a thing into the sunlight, and you generally see what it is." Then suddenly his look changed—darkened and grew stern, as at some secret, sinister vision rolling up unbidden before him. "There is evil," he said in a hardly-controlled voice. "Evil that's real, with a vengeance. But—thank God for the sunlight that lets you see what it is. And may you never know anything about it."

"I'd certainly rather not," Juliet said, half below her breath, "until I was sure of the sunlight."

They did not speak again until they had reached the gate of Ashtree Towers. As they passed in, a gray squirrel darted across the drive.

"They're quite common now," Juliet remarked. "The neighborhood swarms with them."

"So they don't mind bricks and mortar as much as you thought they would?"

"I dare say they know it means food. Perhaps nothing is to be minded which means creature comforts. I suppose," she added with a wavering smile, "bricks and mortar stand for good?"

She had opened the door with her latchkey, and was ushering her visitor into the empty drawing-room.

"Was that," he asked her, "meant for a thrust at me?"

"Not specially. I was really wondering."

She rang for tea, and seated herself by the fire, throw-

ing aside her muff and opening her coat. Mr. Townley, with modest hesitation, took the chair she had indicated.

“Well, I don’t seem to see them as evil,” he said, smiling. “Decent, comfortable houses for an inflated and homeless population . . .”

“And the Grange gardens and field (what survives of them)—they’re evil because they don’t supply any material need of human beings,” said Juliet firmly.

Mr. Townley laughed.

“Perhaps I shall agree with you, if they survive much longer. But I’m inclined to think they *have* supplied a need of human beings, more important than any of the material ones.”

“Kindly explain.”

“They did a lot of things for a little girl I once knew—with the help of the old lady next door. They gave her a world to live in—a world that was full of beauty and dreams and adventures; and room for her soul to grow up in, so that whatever happened it would never be the same for her as if she hadn’t had a world like that.”

Juliet, sitting very still, shot across to him a single keen glance: it showed her that his eyes *had*, undoubtedly, collected more . . .

“Not the same, perhaps,” she said lightly. But her face, as she occupied herself over the tea-table, had a withdrawn look. Though she was still glad to be seeing Mr. Townley, she realized that if she were to see him often he would have to be, in a measure, suppressed. It was disconcerting enough, if also, in a perverse way, pleasant, to find him personally unchanged; to renew acquaintance with the inevitable gray suit, with his little social awkwardnesses (he had just spilled four lumps of sugar in trying to use the tongs), with the plebeian accents that were especially noticeable in his speech when he was feeling happy and natural. But she couldn’t have him trying, with cheerful irresponsibility, to force her childhood back upon her: not only was the resuscitation disturbing and painful, but it took her at a disadvantage, since—unlike

Mr. Townley—she had no certainty as to what her childhood had meant.

“My father will be in soon,” she said. “He’ll enjoy a chat with you after all this long time.” And it occurred to her that before the evening was over Mr. Townley would probably know more than she did about her father’s affairs.

He responded to her less intimate tone; lost his ease, and made stilted inquiries about each member of her family. Juliet, in return, questioned him—not about his war experiences, for she knew instinctively that he would be tongue-tied on the subject, but about the details of his home-coming, and his plans for the future.

“I’m dead keen to get back to work,” he told her, “if there is any. We only landed on Christmas Eve. I ran down home——”

“Home . . .” Juliet interrupted; and the gaze that rested on him suddenly grew intent. “Do you know, Mr. Townley, what a very uninquisitive person I must be; for I’ve no idea what your home consists of!”

“Just my old mother.” He paused. “We’ve a little house at Woking. Comfortable little place it is—semi-detached, with a nice bit of garden.”

Juliet was still regarding him with profound absorption.

“In which,” she remarked after a moment, “you dig and mow and p’lant on Saturday afternoons, with a cozy meat-tea to follow.”

Mr. Townley looked startled. Then he blushed.

“That’s about it,” he said uncomfortably.

And yet—nothing had been farther from her intention than to make him uncomfortable. Why *should* he be uncomfortable, when she had tried, on an unpremeditated and surely laudable impulse, to visualize him as he was in himself and not merely as he affected her? It must be that she hadn’t yet seen him in what he would call the sunlight. Perhaps her vision would always remain destructive, since she was not one of those few who seemed able to command a light that was creative.

Yet, there had been the glimpse of Bruce, that brought her tears; and because of that she would not deny the possibility of such light even for herself.

Mr. Townley stayed to dinner. Juliet had no support but her father's in entertaining him, for the news of his home-coming so upset Angela's nerves that she refused to come down: apparently, she took the view that Mr. Townley's return brought Roy's appreciably nearer. Mrs. Simpson, on the other hand, was fluttered with excitement—and hope. She would have liked to ask him to come up and visit her, but doubted whether such a proceeding would be strictly decorous. Juliet, therefore, was charged with all sorts of friendly messages, including a plea to “stop those dreadful motor-works, and think out some way of making it up to poor dear father.” It was clear that the projected building had begun to prey acutely on Mrs. Simpson's mind.

At dinner, Juliet understood for the first time why Angela used to refer to Mr. Townley as a “hopeless stick.” He was not at his ease: neither her own studied graciousness nor her father's air of benign pomposity (laboriously assumed for the occasion) would serve to loosen his tongue; and she felt that both men were infinitely relieved when she rose and left them to their cigars.

For nearly two hours she stayed alone in the drawing-room, turning the pages of a magazine, staring into the fire, wandering about the room, examining the silver knick-knacks, rearranging the flowers; and, at short intervals, returning to her armchair and her pictures in the fire. She didn't want to think; but it was difficult not to, on this New Year's Eve—difficult not to brood over memories; difficult not to question the future, for all its uncompromising blankness. When, at eleven o'clock, Mr. Townley came in to say good night to her, she had opened the window, and was gazing out toward the Grange field. The last night of the old year seemed to brood upon it tenderly, as if with a sad and secret foreboding: the owls in Miss Tiverton's were crying dismally.

As she turned, letting the curtains fall behind her, she realized that during these two hours Mr. Townley had become his own man again. There was no trace of self-consciousness in his bearing, only a profound and perhaps rather stern preoccupation. The over-modest winner of a D. S. O. and the suburban, Saturday afternoon tiller of cabbages were equally merged in that aspect of him which she had known best and longest. Mr. Townley, coming away from a protracted interview with her father, was once more what he had always been to her in her childhood, "a person who attended to business in a neat gray suit."

But at least her curiosity was aroused; for his expression, though perfectly composed, suggested that the interview had been none too pleasant.

She gave him a quizzical glance.

"Have you and father been quarreling? Come, sit down for a few minutes if you're not in a hurry."

"Well, I suppose we did quarrel a bit," he answered, taking the offered chair half reluctantly, as though he were none too eager for conversation. "But that's not what worries me, 'specially as I hope I've gained my point. I'm sorry and upset about things, Miss Juliet. . . . You didn't tell me——"

She kept silence: it was a case for Mr. Townley telling her, which perhaps he wouldn't do if he thought her father had not given her his confidence.

But as nothing more seemed to be forthcoming, she said tentatively:

"You don't approve of the motor-works scheme, I gather?"

"Well, I should think not!" he declared energetically. "That sort of thing isn't my idea of the fair and square—not by a long chalk. But there, you must pardon me, Miss Juliet, I've no right to criticize Mr. Simpson—not in front of you."

She leaned back, playing with her long necklace.

"It has been *rather* sharp practise, selling the houses,"

she observed languidly. "I thought that myself. But after all, you used to say that what was right in business was wrong in sentiment, and the other way round."

"Yes, but I didn't mean it like that. Sentiment—that's one thing. You may have to harden your heart and cut up pretty bits of country and fine old gardens. But square dealing by your neighbors—that isn't sentiment, though it may be business! What your father was up to—I beg pardon, Miss Juliet; and I ought to be going."

"Not for a minute, please. Were you going to say that what my father's been up to isn't business?"

"Well, I've never sympathized much, myself, with his policy about the Grange. He took the risk of purchase with his eyes open, and I'd nothing particular to say against it, though I couldn't feel sure it would turn out a sound proposition. And he's refused more than one opportunity, to my certain knowledge, of getting, at any rate, some of his money back in a way that wouldn't have compromised his other interests, present or future."

"I can believe that. But don't you see that none of those ways would really have annoyed Miss Tiverton?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If that's been at the bottom of it, I'm afraid he'll find he's cut off his nose to spite his face. Here he is, with the best part of the Grange estate still a dead loss on his hands."

"But—the motor-works?"

"Motor-works be damned!" said Mr. Townley, and then looked severely shocked at himself, and stammered out his apologies.

"Do you mean that there's something against them?"

"Why, your father can't do it, Miss Juliet—not even at the pass things have come to with him."

Juliet waited: she was beginning to be informed.

"No, that he can't," Mr. Townley went on. "And I hope I've made him see it. A man like your father, who's always held his head up—he's not going to retire with a smudged reputation: not if I can help it."

“But would that weigh, if he’s really hard hit, as you suggest?”

“Well, I hope so—I think so. But there are a few other little considerations to throw into the scale, on my side. Your father seems to be satisfied about his legal rights; but I guess he’d have to defend them. If the old lady didn’t care to go for him of her own accord, likely enough there’d be pressure brought to bear on her. He’s got to think of the residents on the other side of the Grange, as well as the people along here. And then there’s the smaller question about this house: it’d sell, but it wouldn’t fetch its value. Taking it merely on the business side, I believe he’d stand to lose in the long run. It’s not as if the price he’d get from these motor people would recuperate his fortunes; whereas, when the old lady dies, as I still believe she’s going to some day——!”

“But what alternative could he possibly consider? Not meekly selling this house and retiring from business? Miss Tiverton’s had a plot to ruin him—or he thinks she has, which comes to the same thing. And wouldn’t he risk bringing down the pillars of the temple, like somebody did in the Old Testament, as long as he felt sure she’d be among the *débris* with him?”

Mr. Townley laughed.

“That does rather describe his mood, I grant you. But we’ve got to save him from it, haven’t we, Miss Juliet?”

“Oh, have we? But I—I don’t feel sure that it matters.”

“Don’t you?” said Mr. Townley curiously; and she saw, in his brief look at her, that she had become an enigma to him. “Well, I do. And I only hope I’ve stopped it.”

“I expect,” Juliet remarked after a pause, “it’s a good thing to feel sure of anything. Do you by any chance feel equally sure what’s going to become of us if we mayn’t sell the land for motor-works?”

“Why, there’s just one obvious thing for your father to do, Miss Juliet—cut his losses and retire.”

“You really think it’s come to that?”

Mr. Townley looked at her, respectfully and compassionately.

"Don't you? A man of your father's age can't begin all over again. And when you come to think of it, seeing how the trade's been hit, it's something for him to have stopped short of actual ruin, 'specially with that bit of bad luck about the Grange, and the heavy calls on his private purse that he was telling me about. But if he closes up now, and lets or sells this house, which is larger than you want, and then later gets a big price for the Grange land, as he certainly will if it's thrown on to the market with Miss Tiverton's—why, the prospect isn't so bad."

At that moment Mr. Townley interested her. It was as if she could see him seeing—constructively. She didn't know exactly what it was that he saw; but she realized that all his keenness and energy and efficiency and good will were concentrated upon building for her father—building for him a present and a future, as if her father's security were to him a matter of urgent importance.

"And have you," she inquired, "suggested anywhere for us to go?"

The question seemed to embarrass him.

"Why, yes," he answered, fidgeting in his chair: "I did mention a nice little place that we might get hold of, if we look sharp—not far from where I live. It's got to be near town, of course, because of Mr. Leslie. Your father would like me to start him in my office . . ."

Juliet interrupted: she really wanted to probe Mr. Townley.

"So you're not too much disgusted with my father's morals?—not afraid that Leslie will be equally difficult to keep on the square?"

He looked confused and hurt.

"Mr. Simpson's always been a good friend to me," he said. "I owe him a lot. And he's always been a straight man of business. Of course, when any one's driven too hard, their judgment may go a bit crooked . . ."

"Smuts on the nose," Juliet murmured parenthetically.

"And I shall be only too happy to do all I can for Mr. Leslie, if he'll come."

"Well, go on about the nice little place."

But descriptive power was not his strong point.

"There's pretty country all round Woking, you know, Miss Juliet, and the house I'm thinking of is just about the right size, with a garden and all."

"Where you could teach father to dig cabbages in his shirt-sleeves . . ."

Juliet disapproved of the remark, but had been unable to suppress it.

Mr. Townley got up and held out his hand.

"I hope you won't think," he said huskily and not quite steadily, "that I don't realize the difference all this makes to you, Miss Juliet. I've no right to say it—but as far as I'm concerned, the bitterest result of this damnable war is your having to change your way of living. . . . And—I'd like to beg your pardon again for forgetting myself about your father."

He wrung her hand and strode out of the room before she had time to answer.

It wanted less than half an hour to midnight, but Juliet did not stir, except to turn off the electric lamp at her elbow. The glow of the dying fire held her gaze hypnotically: she could not help seeing whatever it chose to show her.

There was the outline of a shoddy little house—full, too full, of human shapes, huddled and crouching. They were merely shapes. They had no personality, and but little substance.

There was an autumn wood, burnished in the sunset, littered with leaves. There were no boundaries to that wood. Whichever way you looked, it was an endless vista of arcades, and clearings, and undulations: there were pathways that would lead you across the world—across it and down it and around it, till the sunset became the dawn. Two figures were visible in the wood—a man and a girl.

The figure of the girl had a light wild grace: nothing in her aspect, or fashion of attire, suggested any particular period: she was timeless, like the things in the wood. Poised, airily and proudly, on eager feet, she held out one hand to her companion: the other, by its gesture, claimed possession of the wood, and of all the infinite vistas. . . . Then somebody must have done something; for quite suddenly blackness descended: there was no sunset, no wood, no world.

Juliet started and shivered as the coals fell apart. It was chilly: she had forgotten to shut the window. What extraordinary noise was that? The owls gone mad? Hooting, whistling, shouting, bellowing—a crescendo of crazy uproar. It affected her like a summons—wild, persistent, not to be denied: a summons to wake up, to do something, to share in something.

In a moment she understood: the old year was having its send-off; the new year, the year of peace and of a million radiant hopes, receiving boisterous welcome. But there had been the frenzied note of summons. . . .

It sounded again, nearer: a shrill agitated voice was calling her name.

“Juliet! Juliet!”

She got up and opened the door. Angela, in a flimsy dressing-gown, hovered half-way down the stairs.

“Juliet, *do* come up! This noise makes me so creepy—I can’t stand it.”

She went up, and piloted Angela back into her bedroom. Angela, trembling, paintless and tear-stained, was a pitiful object. Juliet put her into bed.

“What is it?” she asked then, sitting down, “that you dread so much in the New Year?”

“I wish the war wasn’t over,” Angela sobbed. “It may be very wicked, but I do. I think the men are better abroad.”

Juliet considered silence to be the best policy; and she had not long to wait.

“You see,” Angela went on, “Marie’s husband is going to divorce her.”

“Oh!—But does that matter so very much to you?”

“Yes, it does. Because I was so intimate with her, you see; and I couldn’t help knowing some of the things that were going on, though I never would believe there was any real harm. However, I did come home; and yet, in spite of that, I’ve actually got to be a witness in the case!”

“On which side?”

“I’m not quite sure,” said Angela apologetically. “There was a nasty legal sort of document which I couldn’t understand. And I haven’t seen Marie since to ask her. I thought perhaps if I kept away from her they’d forget about me. But whatever happens, of course I shan’t say a word against Marie.”

Juliet leaned back, closed her eyes, and drew a deep breath, trying to steady herself between conflicting impulses: without a supreme effort she must dissolve into hysterical tears or hysterical laughter. The effort succeeded; and after a moment she spoke in her most business-like manner.

“Well, it’s a great nuisance for you, and likely to be unpleasant, I’m afraid. But we must find out exactly how you stand, and perhaps it won’t give you as much trouble as you think.”

“It’s not the trouble I mind,” Angela explained. “I don’t a bit mind answering questions, as long as I’m told beforehand what to say. It’s Roy I’m bothered about. You see, he wrote me lots of times that he didn’t wish me to go on living with Marie; but Marie said that if he hadn’t provided a home for me I’d a perfect right to live where I chose. That’s true enough; only Roy can be so perfectly horrid. If I do the least little thing, he says it isn’t becoming to a clergyman’s wife; and now, when he comes back and finds me mixed up in all this, I’m afraid he’ll be dreadfully annoyed. Father may be unpleasant about it, too; though I hope he’ll think it’s only what the smart set does. It wouldn’t matter, except that there are

some bills I rather want him to pay, to save Roy. I'm always thinking about Roy. Please, Juliet, will you promise to see Roy before I do, and tell him how horribly unfair he is, and explain how he's never understood me?"

Juliet kept long silence.

"I will talk to him," she said at last, "if you really wish it."

"You will? Oh, Juliet, that's very sweet of you. Now I needn't worry any more. What shall you say?"

"Heaven knows."

"I don't mind what you say, if only you'll make him understand me."

"I might be able to, if I understood you myself."

"But I thought you did," said Angela, wondering. "I thought you found me so easy."

"I hope," Juliet answered, "that I've never yet understood you, fully. If I have, I'm afraid I shan't cut any ice with Roy. Why don't you go to Olive?"

"Oh, I couldn't. Olive's so—so downright. She hasn't got the subtlety and temperament that you and I get from mother's side. Olive"—Angela adjusted the lace frills of her boudoir cap, settled her head against the pillows, and assumed an expression of injured innocence—"Olive always takes the line that things could have been helped when they obviously couldn't."

Juliet's mouth twitched.

"Do you wish me to take the line, with Roy, that you're one of the things that couldn't be helped?"

"Just what you think best. I leave it to you."

Juliet got up.

"Where's the legal document?"

"In my handkerchief case, I *think*. Or I might have put it with my gloves."

Juliet spent two days in considering whether Roy, or her father, or Olive, or anybody else could usefully intervene, at the present juncture, in Angela's affairs, and had still come to no decision, when her attention was diverted

by a new and more immediately pressing claim. Mrs. Simpson's ill-health took a turn which, even to her own frightened and reluctant view, necessitated the attendance of a doctor. It was Juliet who received his report.

Oh, this new year! No wonder that the summons to her had been harsh, incoherent and clamorous.

PART FIVE
AND IT WAS SO
CHAPTER XXIV

SHE went straight to the library, where Mr. Simpson sat moodily thumbing the pages of a photograph album that contained records of his professional achievements. She did not attempt to embellish her speech, but told him, simply and quietly, the nature of her mother's illness. And then she waited near him, patiently unobtrusive, while his numbed brain endeavored to get its bearings, and his whitened lips mumbled the few necessary questions.

"It'll mean money," he blurted out at last. "Surgeons—nursing homes—they suck your blood."

That was so like him; but a saving intuition told her that he was, in this moment, doing himself injustice. She even knew that he had not really begun to express himself. So she waited on while he turned another page or two of his album—but now with a hand that shook.

"I don't know how I'm going to face it," he muttered.

Even that might have more than one interpretation.

Suddenly he raised his small bleared eyes: their expression was an incongruous mixture of cunning and rage and despair. He fumbled among the papers on the table, and picked out a sealed envelope.

"I'd written," he said thickly. "Written to refuse. I ought to have posted it yesterday. Townley said the old woman would go for me, likely as not."

For an instant Juliet was bewildered: then, with a little cold shock, she saw into his mind.

"Father," she said, carefully restraining her voice to a tone of gentle reproof, "what could Miss Tiverton have to do with it?"

"Why—you know. You're as sharp as I am. Too sharp, you are. You said yourself it was always the old woman—couldn't be anything else. Always the old woman. But I don't know. . . . I don't know. . . ."

He put his elbows on the table and covered his face.

"We'd better try to think about the practical side of it," Juliet said still gently. "It's quite true, as you say, that there will be a good deal of expense. But I dare say we can arrange things."

"I should have had money in my pocket. I never told you about my offer for the Grange field. But you're sure to know. You know everything. Too much—you know."

"Well, if I do know too much, perhaps it's better than knowing too little. At least it saves time. That letter is a refusal of the offer, isn't it?"

Mr. Simpson shot out his hand and covered the envelope jealously.

"I don't know. Perhaps I shall destroy it. I haven't decided. I won't be rushed, I tell you."

"Don't be. But let's talk about how we shall manage if you do decide to follow Mr. Townley's advice."

They talked. It was a difficult jerky conversation, endlessly complicated by back-eddies and by side-issues. But Juliet discovered, gradually, that Mr. Townley's program of retirement and a little house at Woking was not without attractions for her father, tired, profoundly disheartened, morbidly obsessed—and, for all practical purposes, an old man, as she now discovered him to be. She also discovered that, although he could visualize a tolerable future, given certain conditions, he could not visualize himself in any circumstances whatever apart from his wife. His terror was manifest, though he spoke no word of it. His fingers twitched as they played with the letter: apparently he still could not decide whether to appease his evil genius or to strike a blow . . .

At last, when they had discussed everything, agreed to let Ashtree Towers, and to live, till they could get possession of the Woking house, in a hotel near the nursing-home which had been proposed for her mother, Juliet, greatly daring, took the letter from him. His cheeks turned purple: he spluttered something unintelligible, and made a convulsive movement in his chair as if he wanted to get up and couldn't.

"I'll post this," Juliet said. "Mother will be pleased. She never liked the idea of the motor-works."

She saw, in the corner of her eye, as she left the room, that he had collapsed into complete inertia. His face looked vacant, which was probably its only way of expressing relief from strain.

A tenant was found to take over Ashtree Towers, furnished, from the February half-quarter. Juliet had her hands full and her mind over-burdened.

Angela did nothing except stick to her with limpet-like fidelity. Juliet, having arranged, after consultation with Olive, that her position should be professionally explained to her and her interests duly protected, could only hope, day by day, for news of Roy's return. His battalion was quartered on the Rhine, but he must have had the chance of leave; and she suspected that he had cravenly declined it, choosing to postpone the evil day of reunion with his wife. He might have to be informed by letter of the pending crisis; but Juliet clung to a vague and apparently irrational hope of being able, somehow, to "deal" with him personally—to show something, or suggest something, that might save Angela from the ultimate calamity of being abandoned by Roy. She would try, in the leisure that night gave her, to put herself in Roy's place, to search into the situation with Roy's eyes. It was a critical situation, for a man who wanted to get on with his vocation. Olive said that it was "up to Roy now to make a job of Angela, and that was that." Certainly parsons were less likely than other men to wash their hands of their wives:

they usually had a strong sense of duty. But parsons were human beings; and you couldn't count on even a parson to endure the unendurable unless he could find in it at least a shred of worth-whileness. Juliet knew very little about her brother-in-law, but she had an idea that he would not react to the kind of stimulus Olive might apply. If Angela had had any vices Roy might have saved his reason by the healthy occupation of converting her. But if she had nothing. . . . True, there was her respectability, as Olive had pointed out. What on earth *was* respectability? Juliet never got any further than that.

Leslie, demobilized, and enjoying a "look-round" before he finally committed himself to Mr. Townley's office, kept dashing up in taxis, borrowing the fare from household funds, and asking for things (usually of a "pawnable" nature) which he declared were his christening presents and not on any account to be trusted to the tenants. But he was full of bright resolutions, and carried himself as though the virtue which had accrued to him from not being sued for breach of promise must be shining forth in a visible halo round his head.

Mrs. Simpson, established in a nursing-home and slowly recovering from an inconclusive operation, sent urgent messages by post or telephone at least every day. As often as not it fell to Juliet to answer, as and when she could, these desperate appeals for company. Angela's nerves would not stand the strain of other people's illnesses; and Mr. Simpson, though in the cause of marital affection he tore himself away periodically from the belvedere where his last days at Ashtree Towers were mainly spent, shed so heavy a gloom over the sick-room that the nurses discouraged his visits.

For Juliet this attendance on her mother was almost the last straw. Given immunity from feeling—and she enjoyed that, amid the practical activities connected with a "move"—everything was possible; but Mrs. Simpson, weak, bewildered, apprehensive, garrulous and devoid of "make-up," came very near to undoing her.

“We shall be so happy, dear, shan’t we, in a pretty little country cottage? It’s quite the thing nowadays, isn’t it? All the best people are living in a simple way, and only the war-profiteers have big houses. I’m not sorry in the least about leaving Ashtree Towers. Oughtn’t you to begin looking for servants? You get a better class of servant in the country, I believe. A superior servant is *such* a comfort. There was a girl I had once, Clara Fairbanks——”

Or, on days when she was too weak to be cheerful:

“All this about me must have been a great upset to your dear father. I do wish he needn’t have known. He was always so proud of me, Juliet dear. But I’ve not lost my looks, have I? though the nurses are too busy to take quite the pains with my toilet that I used to myself. I wonder if that’s why your father doesn’t come very often. . . .”

And once, after a long bout of pain and exhaustion:

“I think I’ll come home to-morrow, Juliet, and move to the hotel, and then to Woking, with you all. It’ll be more like home for you, wherever you are, if I’m there. Your dear father will never be comfortable anywhere without me. And I want Roy to find Angela safe in her mother’s keeping: it’s more becoming to her position. And Leslie—he’ll have so much to tell us, in the evenings, about his new life. I wonder if there might be a room to spare in the Woking house for Olive and the babies? It would cost her less to live with us. I shall take up the house-keeping. You did it beautifully, but you’re sure to marry now the war’s over. When will Cousin Maud invite you again? What! You could go when you liked and haven’t *wanted* to! Well, I’m sure I can hardly spare you, dear: I seem to depend on you more and more; but I think you ought to take your chances. I should dearly like to have another daughter as well married as Angela. You shall go to Cousin Maud’s in a week or two. Yes, I’ll come home to-morrow. I don’t think I must be left here. There’s something”—the voice fell to a whisper—“something

about this place. . . . They're very kind, but I don't like it. I'm sure I could manage nicely at home. You'll help me at first, won't you, Juliet? And perhaps at Woking we shall get a really superior maid, like Clara Fairbanks. The best maids don't care to live with war-profiteers."

Juliet's defenses broke down completely when, a week before the tenants were due to arrive, she removed her father and Angela and herself to a Bloomsbury hotel—of the "private," and economical, order. There was, for the present, nothing definite to plan or accomplish: there was nothing to desire in the future: it held only a threat of lurid contingencies. And even that which she used at Ashtree Towers to regard as the "pretense of living" was done away. She was sure that she had had no sentimental attachment to her old home; but now, in this new and sordid environment, naked of associations, the sense of the void returned upon her in full force.

After two days she deserted, leaving her father to nurse his depression and a cold in his head, while Angela did what she could to raise the social tone of the establishment—wonderfully cheered by the thought, which had suddenly struck her, that her prestige as a witness in Marie's divorce case (if only it came on while she was here) would make an immense impression on the *bourgeois* mind of the Bloomsbury private hotel.

Juliet took refuge with Olive. The amenities of civilization were even less evident in Olive's house than in the hotel, and the tumult of babies could scarcely act as a restorative for exhausted nerves. Olive, though delighted to receive her, made haste to point these things out.

"Never mind," said Juliet briefly. "It's a home. It's got meaning—of some sort."

And later in the evening, when the children were in bed, she flung herself on a hassock at Olive's feet.

"Olive, what *has* happened to me? If you know, you ought to say."

"But I don't think I do know."

Juliet told her the story of Bruce.

“Yes,” said Olive at last quietly, “I suppose I guessed there had been something like that. But you say yourself you don’t know exactly what he meant to you. So why not carry on?”

“Because I can’t be sure that there’s anything worth carrying on with—anything real. Olive, do you remember once saying that you wanted realness above everything, and that we were shams?”

“I said that some of us were. We did do a lot of play-acting—mother and Angela and I. But you were very wise in your infancy—much wiser than I was. You thought that people in themselves couldn’t be shams.”

“Was that wisdom? What did you mean by realness, precisely?”

“I suppose I meant life—bed-rock life. I did want (just as you did afterward) to get away from artificialities. And of course I plunged at the first thing that looked like a loophole—the one and only Archie.”

“You were in love with Archie. You thought realness was love.”

Olive made a grimace.

“There’s a condition which people describe as being in love with love. However, I won’t defend myself. I was very much more deeply in love with Harry; and being married to Harry taught me that realness, or life, or whatever you choose to call it, is ever so much bigger even than the love of man and woman. Love may be a way of getting it; but it can’t be the only way. When you were a child,” she added after a moment, “I used to think that you would certainly get it.”

“By what way?”

“Oh, I don’t know exactly,” said Olive, puckering her forehead. “I haven’t got much of an analytic mind. But you were endowed with something I never had, except in scraps. Dreams . . . a sense of beauty . . . imagination.”

“But what a hopeless contradiction!” Juliet protested.

“Wouldn’t all that be a sheer impediment to—to seeing things as they are?”

“But you don’t usually want to see things as they are. It’s apt to be too depressing. You want to see them as they ought to be, as they still may be—and all the more easily for your seeing them like that.”

Juliet, with her hands clasped round her knees, gazed into the fire. She didn’t speak for some time. She had before her mind’s eye a room at Templewood House, and Cousin Maud showing her a photograph. And through and behind and all round that picture was a fire-red glow, melting into infinite vistas. . . .

“If that’s your way,” she said at last, “you must have imagination, though you say you haven’t.”

“I’m not aware of it,” Olive answered. “But perhaps my vision was adjusted once for all. It’s as if—as if I’d got somewhere, with Harry—into a clearer atmosphere, that shows things as they’re meant to be seen.”

“Yes, that’s it,” Juliet said in a low voice, “you do have to get somewhere. And you said once that I was going on the wrong tack.”

“I think I was sorry that you tried to ‘go’ at all. You had your vision: it only wanted to be wider and deeper and more constant—not different. That snobbish little prig, Margaret Sadler—well, she seemed to me to be leading you down a blind alley.”

“Not a blind alley,” Juliet said. “It opened into a void. And that’s more difficult to get out of. You can see in a void, Olive. But the things you see are mostly hollow, as if the void had forced its way inside them. And—it seems to be inside yourself, too.”

Olive took up a child’s sock from the pile in her lap and darned vigorously, as an accompaniment to thought.

“Still, a void can’t be hopeless,” she observed at last. “There’d always be the chance of an atmosphere getting in.”

On the fifth day of her visit to Olive, her father tele-

phoned to bid her meet him at Ashtree Towers, in order to look into some newly-raised question before the arrival of the tenants. He had mentioned three o'clock as the hour of meeting; but Juliet, partly to escape the noisy importunities of her nephews and nieces, partly to indulge a craving for fresher air, set out immediately after Olive's twelve o'clock dinner. From the Tube station at Northmore she made her way to the heath. It was very quiet up there. The mid-February day held a faint breath of spring: on either hand the distant views lay open in blue lucidity. Subdued sunlight played on the gray waters of the pond. Thrushes and blackbirds in the high gardens near were practising for their full spring chorus. The south wind carried memories of its far-off voyaging—now the scent of some country where flowers were already in bloom, now a keen breath from the sea.

She found a bench, and sat gazing with an empty but momentarily peaceful mind at the russet patches of dead bracken on the sward below. It was a long time since she had committed herself to solitude in fresh air and to the influence of natural beauties. She couldn't be happy; but she was refreshed and peaceful.

After a while it dawned on her that a little lower down the hill, also alone on a bench, was a man whose figure seemed familiar—though shapeless, thanks to a thick, loosely-folded muffler that blotted out all contours between his shoulders and the brim of his bowler hat. Beside him on the bench was a paper bag, out of which he appeared to be eating something. Juliet, after long survey, came to the conclusion that this person, however improbably, was her father.

She objected to its being her father. Not that he hadn't, in the abstract, as much right as she had to be sitting on the heath, getting what he could out of the first spring day. But his presence jarred her: it was unexpected, and it was unsuitable. Why wasn't he having his lunch properly in the Bloomsbury hotel, instead of eating things that he had brought with him in a paper bag?

People like her father would become quite impossible if they took to deviating from their usual habits. There would be no certainty of getting away from them, even when it was absolutely necessary: they might turn up anywhere, at any moment. And they couldn't be ignored. They changed everything. Already her father had completely changed—and spoiled—the aspect of the heath.

She tried to laugh away the absurd sense of injury. But it persisted, and she really couldn't bring herself to go and sit beside him. When he chose to move she would join him.

She tried, but failed, to recover her mood of reverie. Her eyes wandered restlessly. She glanced at her wrist-watch, wondering how long her father intended to remain there. But it was not yet a quarter to two.

She noticed some way off on the sward below a man and a woman with a dog in leash. They were following a track that would lead them up the hill. She watched them idly. Their conversation evidently absorbed them. The woman, dressed in black, with imposing furs, was quite young; but she walked majestically, unperturbed by the pullings and strainings of her leashed Pekinese. Somehow, her bearing suggested an inherent, if decently veiled, satisfaction with everything that concerned her. The man was much older. His step had no buoyancy: his thin shoulders were bent. Sometimes he leaned toward his companion, as though courteously anxious not to miss anything she said.

Their rising path brought them, though they were still some distance away, nearly on a level with Juliet's eyes.

She sat for a moment absolutely rigid: then, on an impulse that she had no time or power to explain, she sprang up, ran a few steps downward, and seated herself on her father's bench.

"Hallo!" he said, with his mouth full. "What are *you* doing here? Look out—you're sitting on my buns."

She moved aside, but didn't speak.

"Thought the air would do my cold good," her father

condescended to explain. "And as for the food in that place, it isn't fit for rats. I spoke my mind to the manageress, or whatever she calls herself, this morning. You'll have to come back."

She heard him, of course; and perhaps she answered. But her whole consciousness had centered itself upon Margaret and Margaret's father. They would have to pass near her.

She had heard of Margaret's being married. It was evidently a prosperous marriage, for her clothes were costly, and her face, on this closer view, confirmed the impression first conveyed by her manner of walking. She had gained in everything that had been hers before—in physical comeliness, in material prosperity, in social importance, in self-approbation—yes, in everything that could possibly contribute to her enjoyment of life. No wonder that her features, for all their refined composure, blazoned out an invulnerable content. True, there lay lightly over them, at this moment, a sweet and pensive sadness: probably she and her father had been talking of their bereavement. But Margaret's radiance could afford that becoming shadow.

In John Sadler's lined face there was the shadow without the radiance.

They might turn aside: the path forked; but in any case they would have to come near.

Margaret's eyes met Juliet's: for an instant she—even she—seemed a trifle disconcerted; then she bowed and smiled very graciously, and turned into the track that branched away. John Sadler had scarcely had time to complete his recognition. He accompanied his daughter a pace or two, spoke to her, hesitated—began to come back. Perhaps he thought that Margaret was following him; but Margaret's attention was occupied with her dog. You can do a good deal with a leashed dog: you can unleash it, and then have to hurry after it, to see that it doesn't get into mischief.

John Sadler, approaching with a slow diffident step,

had almost the look of a sleep-walker: at least his demeanor suggested that he was doing something he couldn't help doing, and had no very clear reason for doing. But, as he came closer, you could see that his face was by no means vacant: only, somehow, all expression was concentrated in the tired brilliant eyes. It was his eyes that spoke to Juliet when, shyly, he offered her his hand. If his voice said anything, she didn't take it in. The other—the thing that his eyes said—was overwhelming. They said—no, it was rather that they did something: they seemed to kindle her, to expand her, almost to create her: they made her—Griselda, in the glow of a sunset wood. And having created her, they appealed to the greatness of her understanding.

She had forgotten her father. But in a moment John Sadler was talking to him. The weather—her father's cold—the view—she had but a vague impression of what they were talking about. In another moment John Sadler had lifted his hat and gone away. She was alone with her father, as before: as before—only, perhaps, a degree more desolate by reason of the creative light that had flashed upon her and flashed away.

“Who's that chap?” Mr. Simpson inquired. He spoke with unusual animation, and complacently brushed the crumbs from his coat.

Juliet told him.

“What, the dramatist? Very distinguished fellow, John Sadler, from all I've heard. And very pleasant, I must say. If you know them, why haven't you trotted them out?”

“I—I don't fancy that you and he would have very much in common.”

“Well, I don't set out to be lit'ry, if that's what you're driving at. But I hope I could get on with a man like him. Very pleasant, with no nonsense about him. Seemed anxious to know me, too.” Then he looked at his watch. “We'd better go along,” he said. “I must be back early, with my cold.”

Undoubtedly he was cheered up: he had not been so talkative for months. As they went on their devious, downhill way toward Ashtree Avenue, Juliet, absorbed in her thoughts, was aware of his garrulity only as of some petty external distraction: her curt mechanical answers were like the slap into nothing with which one hopes to rid one's self momentarily of a hovering midge.

("Yes, you might try eucalyptus.")

She wanted to fathom, that eventually she might quell, the profound disturbance which John Sadler had wrought in her being. It was as if he had plunged her, for an instant, into some element that utterly transformed her—that gave her shape, and fulness and beauty, and meaning, and life; as water gives to the dried rose of Jericho. But that was rather cruel: the rose couldn't command, couldn't retain, its element; and it hurt—yes, it hurt, to have to close up again, to become faded, desiccated, formless, unalive.

("Burned porridge is horrible, I know.")

She wondered, too, about the impulse which had driven her to go and sit beside her father. There was no explanation of it—unless it had been a protective impulse; unless she had had a fear, unformulated, unrecognized, of the Sadlers—of John Sadler; fear of a possible approach. Certainly she would have supposed that her father's companionship must guard her against that. But it hadn't guarded her: it had made absolutely no difference.

("By all means, I should ask for an egg with your tea.")

"There'll be no comfort," Mr. Simpson declared, with an urgency that would brook no inattention, "till we get settled again. Only another six weeks. Your mother'll be fit by then, won't she?"

"I hope so, father. We can't be certain."

"I think she will. I'm very glad I turned down these motor people. They pressed me hard; but as I told them all along, I had to consider my neighbors. I've never yet done a mean or inconsiderate action, and I hope I never shall."

Well, it was something to have him so pleased with himself: if only he would stop talking—let her close up, fade out quietly, in the void.

John Sadler was tired and unhappy; but he knew nothing of the void: he commanded the resources of a world. He had come and gone, vouchsafing no hint as to where or how a way—a way back—into that world might be discovered. She walked, in broad daylight, with a groping step, questioning whatever presented itself to her wistful vision—the passers-by, the houses, the lamp-posts, the stones of the pavement.

As they descended the long hill a change came gradually over the day. The fresh wind had dropped, the sun disappeared: there prevailed a muggy stillness, a faint smell of fog. It was not much more than two o'clock—she had heard the hour strike from a distant church; but it was virtually the end of the day. Toward evening, perhaps, there might be a kindling in the west, a brief reappearance of the sun; but the skies now were opaquely shrouded.

The birds, however, suffered no discouragement: all they cared for was the mildness of the weather. Their warbles and twitters became blither, more frequent, in the neighborhood of the old road.

This road was entered from a turning half-way down. Ashtree Avenue lay on the opposite side, a little way up-hill.

Juliet was not looking about her now: it seemed better to pass quickly and furtively through these too familiar scenes. Any question she asked of them would assuredly be thrown back unanswered.

Her father stopped at the point where one always crossed for Ashtree Avenue; and then she glanced up.

Something arrested her attention—something different, not to be fitted in. For a few seconds she scarcely realized what it was: her detachment had been so complete that she could perceive an object without apprehending its significance, or even its nature.

Miss Tiverton's gates were open. She had never happened before to see them open; but it wasn't only that. It

was a definite object that challenged her recalcitrant eyes—challenged, and drew them, and finally focused them upon itself. . . . A long black thing, on wheels—a sort of carriage, with glass sides. Another black carriage stood behind it.

She heard, close to her ear, an inarticulate sound, and glanced at her father. He stood, as immobile as she was, leaning a little forward with his hands clasped over the knob of his stick. His heavy red face had a bewildered, almost a shattered, look. He was incredulous, as she was, of what he saw.

“One of the servants,” he muttered. “One of the servants.”

Her gaze traveled up the vista of Miss Tiverton’s garden. All was empty and still, as she had been used to imagine it. There was nothing to see but the flagged way, disappearing into trees—a flagged way with low box borders on either side, and, in the shelter of the borders, little patches of white. Snowdrops—tiny clumps of snowdrops. And there was nothing to hear, except a bird really excited about this promise of spring. *Don’t you know it? Time to get ready—time to wake up. Don’t you know it? Don’t you know it?* Yes, and far away, down the old road, a street violin playing good music very badly. Still, thanks to its being so far away, you got the majestic, melancholy rhythm of the Beethoven minuet.

“Housekeeper, very likely,” Mr. Simpson suggested.

Strange, that in, or across, the silence—a silence too profound to be really broken, these three things alone should be vocal—a bird, Mr. Simpson, and a street violin. Strange—incongruous beyond all powers of imagining: an absurdity that over-reached itself: an absurdity that couldn’t really be absurd: something, rather, that belonged to the splendid gravity of time immemorial. She remembered a phrase from somewhere—“the foolishness of God.” It was like that. . . .

“Never happened to see the gates open,” said Mr. Simpson, uneasily probing the silence.

The fiddler, far away down the hill, bravely struggled with his melody; and the bird sang on.

Don't you know what this waking up, this getting ready, this opening of gates, is for? Everything knows it but you. Even the snowdrops are ready; and that's an early crocus, pushing its gold in between. Time to get ready—time to tune up. Don't you know it?

“Sad,” Mr. Simpson remarked thickly, “on a nice spring day like this.”

There's no sadness. The thing's been preparing through years—more years than you can remember—through all the years—through time immemorial. You must have known there was purpose—fulfilling itself between these walls. At least you knew of a life being lived. It's a splendid thing to have lived a life. Don't you know it?

“It—it couldn't be the old lady,” Mr. Simpson mumbled. “Us happening to come like this.”

Why shouldn't it be the old lady? Why shouldn't you happen to come? It's not as if anything “happened.” Of course you came. There's purpose—you're not outside it? If you never knew before, can't you see now that there's purpose? Don't you know it? Don't you know it?

At last, a movement—far away, indistinct among the trees.

“Solemn thing, death,” Mr. Simpson observed in his Sunday voice.

The movement took form: there were figures emerging from the trees. Figures of men, black-clad—stooping a little under the burden that they carried between them.

“No flowers,” said Mr. Simpson. “The housekeeper, no doubt.”

But the housekeeper was there, following behind; and the ogre, and the witch-woman.

Mr. Simpson breathed heavily.

“Funny thing, no flowers. She must have been well off.”

Why should there be flowers? This is her garden. . . .

She's coming among her flowers. Don't you see the snowdrops? And the crocus? They're hers. They were always for her. They knew she was coming down her garden. That's why they're ready. Everything's ready. Don't you know it?

The procession came forward, with a movement that was rhythmic and very slow.

"No mourners except the servants," said Mr. Simpson unhappily.

Why should there be mourners? What is there to mourn for? She's through with it now. Life takes some getting through. There's so much in life that only you know of: adventure and striving, and hoping and waiting—long waiting, sometimes—and tears. But also there's humor. You can't get on with life if you don't take count of its humor. But if you do—it's not tears that it leaves you with in the end.

"Lots of harm she did me," said Mr. Simpson. "Though perhaps one oughtn't to think of that now."

She had idiosyncrasies, just as you have. She didn't always like what you liked. But there may have been reasons. There are ways of thinking, ways of seeing, that you don't know about—yet. And she had to fulfil her purpose. There is a purpose: it's a mystery, but it's real. It's real, and not unkind. Don't you know it?

"I suppose I annoyed her too, in some ways," Mr. Simpson murmured pensively.

They were passing between the snowdrops, that seemed to quiver. . . . In a moment they would reach the gates. Mr. Simpson took off his hat.

"Well, it's what we all come to," he muttered. "Sol-
emn thought, that we carry nothing away with us when we die."

The strains of the violin, faint, broken, but persistent, still floated up the hill. The bird broke into richer song.

Of course, she doesn't carry anything away. She doesn't want to. She's got herself. That's what she was waiting

for. She was being created, like you are, in time immemorial. Now she's finished. It's yourself you take over the threshold, into eternity. Don't you know it? Don't you know it? Don't you know it?

For an instant, she was very near to Juliet. Did the air really tremble with the vibrations of an unvoiced message? Juliet, as if bidden, looked again through the gates, down the way by which Miss Tiverton had come. Miss Tiverton was carrying nothing with her; but had she left anything behind? There was a hen straying aimlessly across the path. . . . Nothing more. What should there be, with Miss Tiverton gone? It was only the place where she had lived. Then the gates were closed.

Hearse and carriage moved, always slowly, always rhythmically, down the hill, westward. You could watch them for a long way. The fiddler was still plodding at his tune. Children were racing on the pavements. A coal wagon blundered up the road. Outside one of the houses a chauffeur was starting the engine of his car. But there came a momentary lull in all these activities when Miss Tiverton passed. Except in the fiddling. And that was infused with a new zest, as though the fiddler had found inspiration. He couldn't grapple with his inspiration; but at least he declared, or tried to declare, in crippled phrases, that he knew himself to be in the presence of something that might be sad, but was also beautiful, and humorous, and kind.

She carried nothing away. In a moment she would have passed out of view. Her road, at the bottom of the hill, took an upward incline: beyond that was only the sky—the western sky, whose gray veil had become faintly luminous as the afternoon wore on. Something showed against it in silhouette: showed, and vanished. The fiddler still fiddled. The children were shouting and racing. The coal wagon was rumbling on its way. The motor-car shot past it. hooting.

Vanished. And the gates were closed upon an empty garden, an empty house. Vanished—but not without passing through the common, noisy world; not unheeded by that world; not—you could dare to imagine—herself unheeding. There would always be mysterious contacts, unspoken recognitions, great clearness and sympathy of mutual regard between the denizens of a world that was real. And there would always be a strange stirring, a wonder, a wistful triumph, when there passed out from the number of those who were being created, who were helping to create each other, one for whom the splendid purpose had been achieved. In a world that was real: in time immemorial.

Juliet knew why the gates were closed. She knew what Miss Tiverton had left behind her; knew that it was nowhere, everywhere; knew that it had come flooding into the void.

Her father had gone on his way. Moving at last, she saw him in front of her, walking with a heavy labored step. She caught him up.

“Very upsetting things, funerals,” he remarked. And after a moment: “You do think your mother’s getting on?”

“Yes, father—quite as well as they hoped.”

They turned the corner of Ashtree Avenue.

“It might have made a lot of difference to our plans, if this had happened before. And yet—I don’t know. That’s a decent little house at Woking, if only it suits your mother. Rather small; but I suppose Angela won’t be with us for ever?”

“Certainly not,” Juliet said. “She and Roy will be settling down somewhere.”

“Funny thing, how they never do seem to settle anywhere for long. I sometimes wonder if Angela’s a bit flighty.”

“She’s very respectable underneath,” said Juliet demurely. “I suppose there’s something to be said for that.”

“Well, I should think so! Respectability—why, it’s the foundation of everything. And I should hope”—Mr.

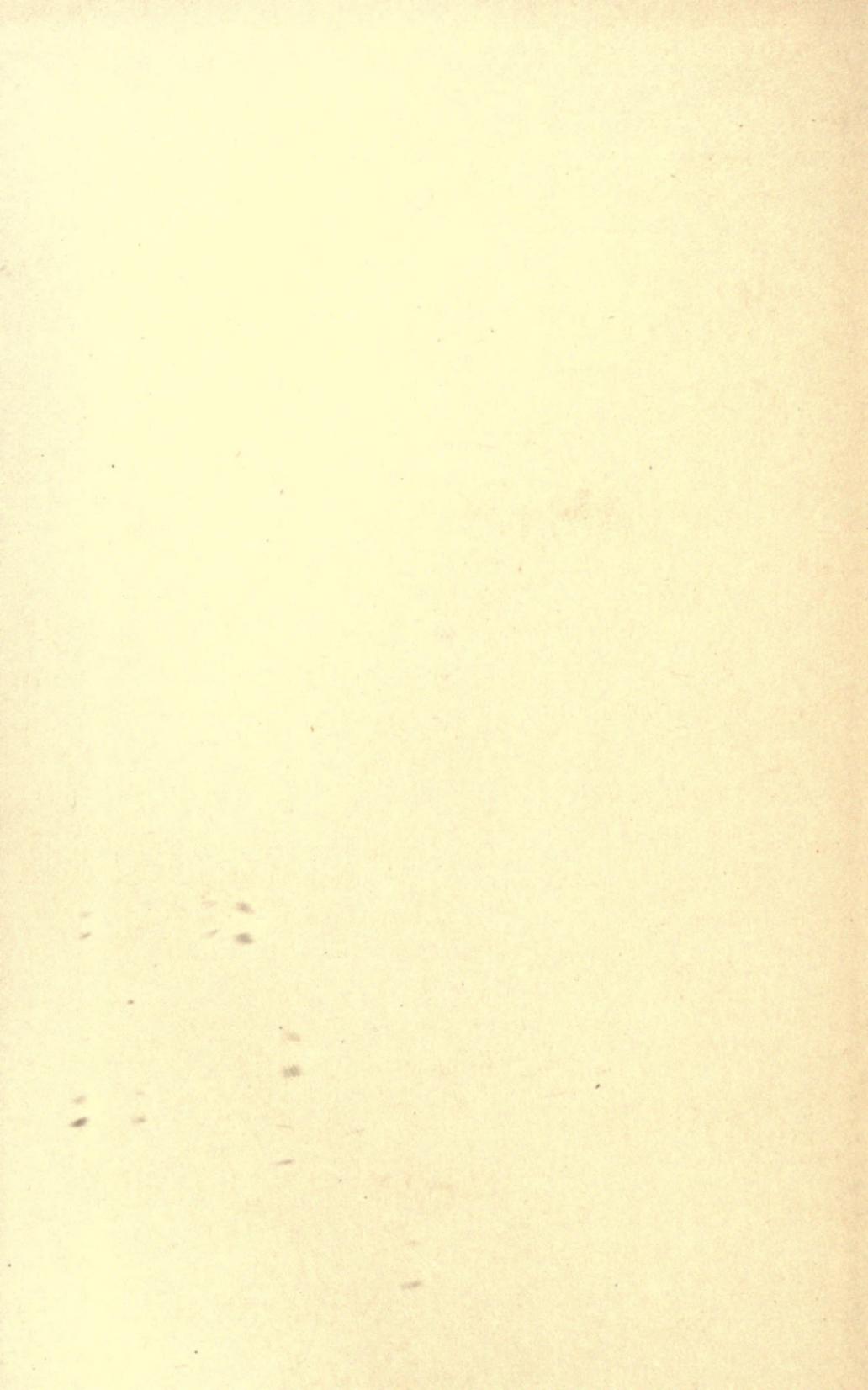
Simpson squared his shoulders—"I should hope any daughter of your mother's and mine *would* be respectable, whatever else she wasn't. Hallo! What's this?"

It was a straying cat—old, rusty-coated, purblind, and mi-aowing plaintively—which had got by mistake between Mr. Simpson's legs.

"It's Miss Tiverton's cat," Juliet said; and she picked it up. Furtively, from beneath her lowered eyelids, she threw him a glance in which laughter quivered. "Shall we take it into the house till its people come back, and give it some milk?"

"I don't like black cats," Mr. Simpson said uncomfortably. "And I dare say there won't be any milk. But I don't know that I mind, just this once—considering everything."

THE END



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